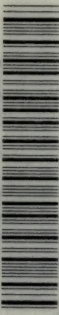


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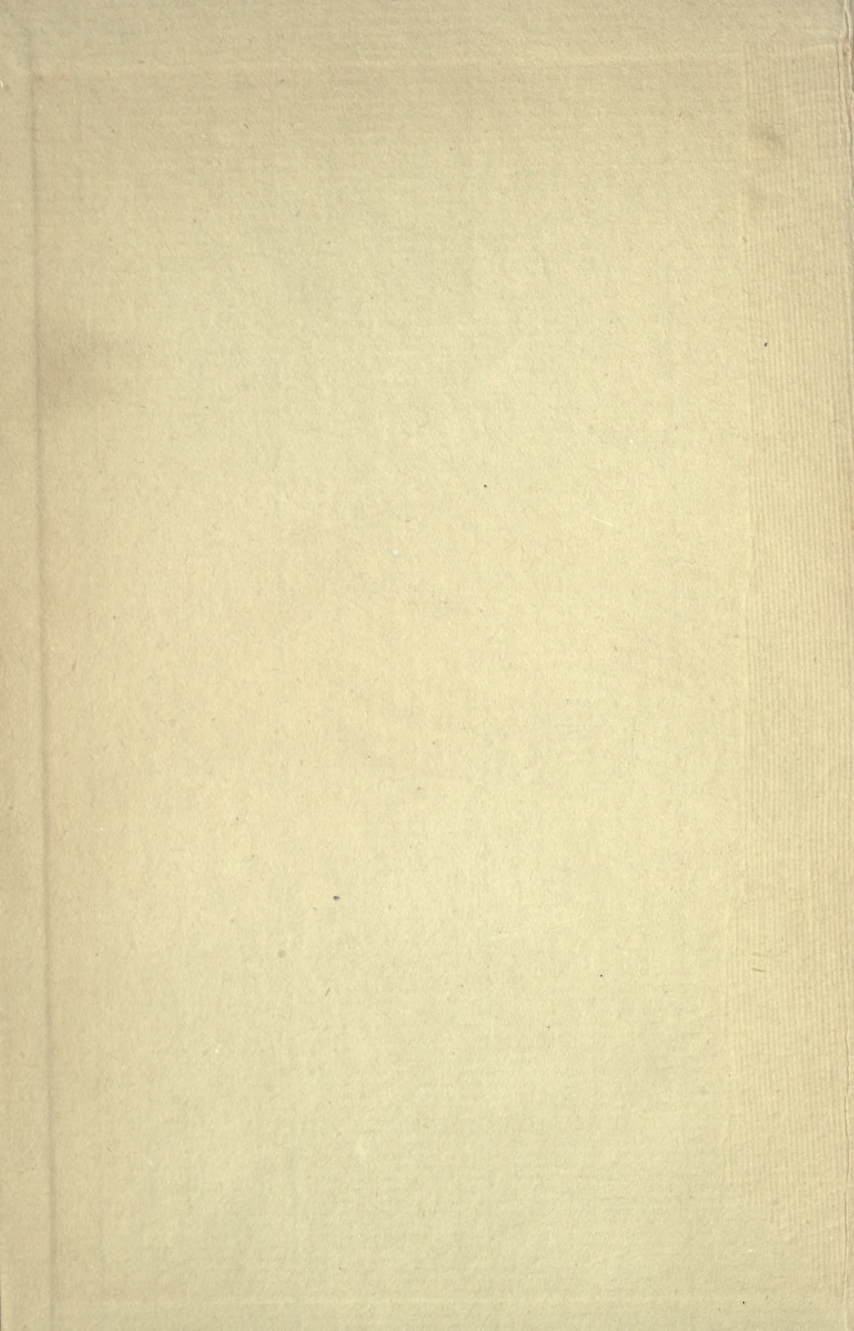
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by
M. P. Shiel



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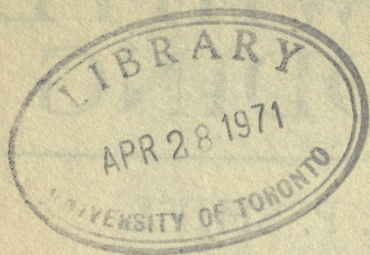
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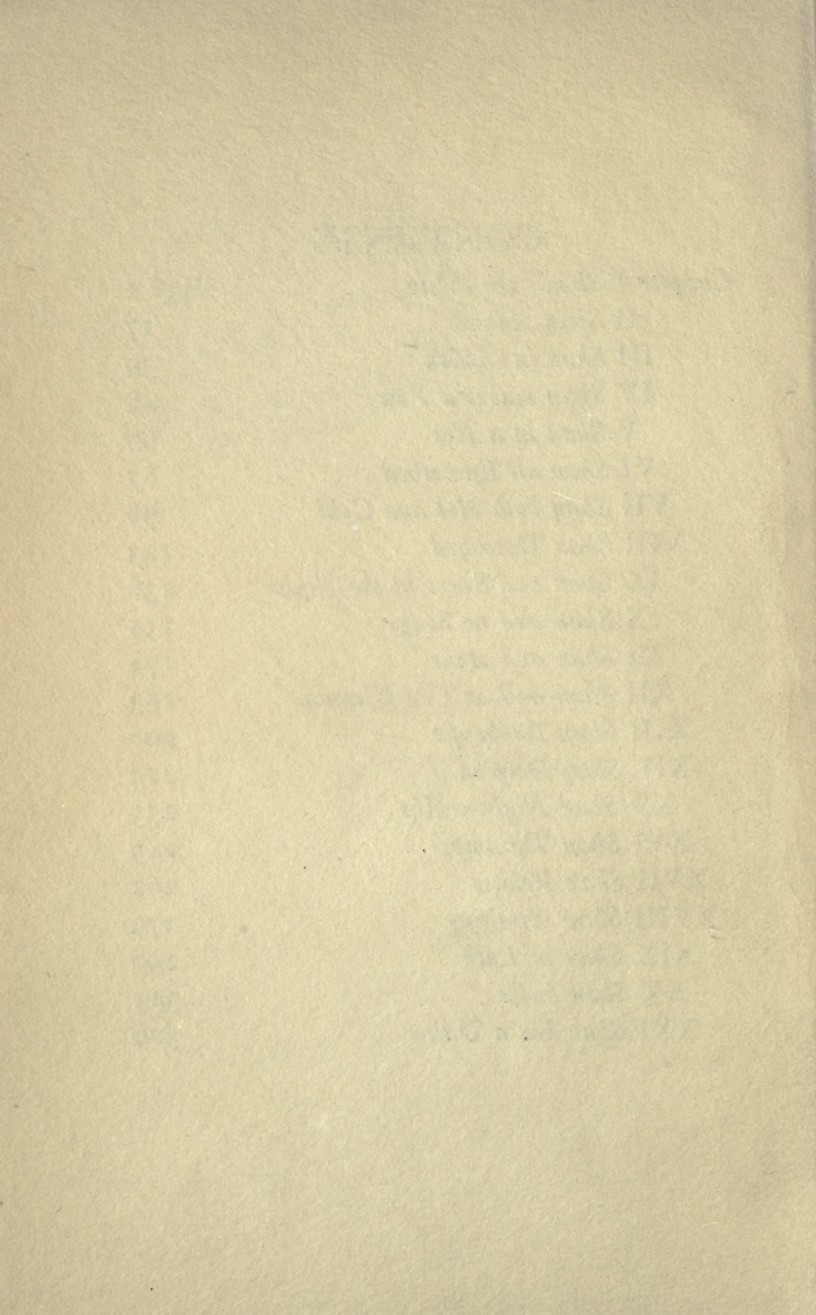
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THE WHITE WEDDING

I

SHAN'S THE MAN

ARTHUR GORDRIDGE, the young master of Glanncourt, just getting better of a sickness that had brought him home from his regimental district, lay on a sofa during the forenoon of that 18th of September 1899 whose *Times* on the floor at his feet was furious with the news that President Kruger had refused to accept any of our propositions made to him on the eighth of the month; but even these growlings of the outbreak now near could not too greatly jingoize Gordridge's mind that morning, and his pile of papers having slipped off the sofa, his looks hankered towards the door.

Presently when the door opened his eye brightened: but the young lady who came in was not the one whom he longed to see.

“How are you this morning, Arthur?” she asked.

"Well, I think I begin now to feel some life in me again, thanks, Anne," he answered.

"Aunt Margaret asks you how you are, and whether there will be war."

"Well, I suppose there will be war; it will be intolerable if there is not after the insolence of these little farmer-people."

"I wonder if *you* will have to go to fight?"

"Not very likely."

"But if your company goes. . . ."

"Even in that case. . . . I am on the sick-list, Anne."

"But you'll soon be better, and having no special temptation to stay. . . ."

"Don't worry, Anne, just mention to mother what I say. . . . Why, by the way, doesn't somebody remove this tray from my side?"

"You might have rung. . . . I'll take it."

"As you like."

"Or would you prefer that Rosie—? By the way, talking of Rosie, have you heard about her? You have been so much abroad, and so chippy since you came, that I dare say you know precious little about us others here, really. But perhaps you are not much interested in your mother's *pantins*, Arthur."

"I'm sure I don't know why you choose to

call Rosie a *pantin*," answered Arthur, "she is mother's adopted daughter, precisely as you are, and one of the family."

Anne Hine smiled at this: the slightest minx of not yet twenty-three years, anaemic, neat as an ear-ring; plain but quaint; with lines about the mouth which meant biting, meant impish; and some glint in the gold of those golden eyes which meant—genius? some shriek in that region.

"Well," said she, "I must now set about to adjust myself to this new point-of-view about my Rosie, not a toy, but 'one of the family.' Her father was a twenty-acre farmer on one of the estate-farms But have you been told, Arthur, that Rosie is to be married?"

"Rosie?"

"Yes."

"To be married?"

"Yes, Arthur."

"Ah, I hadn't been told. Well, she seems a sweet little body, so I don't wonder; I only hope it is to some possible sort of man."

"You remember Shan O'Shannon, don't you? It is to him. He has lately been made head-keeper, though an unmarried man, and, yes, he's a 'tidy' man, as_n they say here, though wedded

to Socialistic notions; Aunt Margaret, in fact, has lately had the thought of getting him off the estate for airing his arguments round about, but she didn't after, he is such a popular chap."

"O'Shannon: I don't remember," said Arthur.

"What, not that man with his thumb shot off? He turns up like clock-work twice a day to ask after you . . ."

"Oh, you mean 'Bull's head'!" exclaimed Arthur, "that for some reason was the only name he was known by when I was a boy; of course I remember! why, the fellow used to follow me about like a spaniel, our whole youth almost was spent with one another. You mean 'Bull's-head'! That's all right! *He*, of course, could never do for Rosie."

"But, then, it must be all wrong, Arthur, seeing that they are affianced," was Anne Hine's answer.

"But that is too absurd for words! Mother would never entertain such a suggestion. . . . First place, the fellow is short of a thumb—"

"Oh, Arthur, it isn't the thumb that makes the patriarch. And if it has been a bargain for years, Arthur, between Aunt Margaret and the man . . . ? For that matter, O'Shannon is a

sober chap, grand at 'kippuring', with some cash in the bank, and—"

She was interrupted by a shy rap, and agush with blushes Rosie Jones entered, a girl of not much more than seventeen: upon which Anne said keenly to Arthur: "Here is Rosie come, you see, of her own accord . . . I will tell Aunt what you say," and out she hurried, though outside in the corridor she stood hearkening, while Rosie asked Arthur how he was that morning.

"Much better thanks, Rosie," mumbled Arthur, holding a newspaper anew before his face, afresh interested in President Kruger.

She, for her part, raised the tray, but replaced it on the table, in order with a bent head to rearrange the cups, etc., on it, while Arthur looked at the paper, till, as she again raised the tray, he said to her: "So you are engaged, Rosie?"

"Who is, Arthur?" asked Rosie, again getting rid of the tray.

"Isn't that so?"

"Why, no, Arthur."

"You give me your assurance as to that?"

"I'm not engaged to anyone, Arthur, I'm sure. What could have made you think such a thing?"

“Isn't there something about a man named O'Shannon, a gamekeeper?”

“About Shan O'Shannon? Oh, I am not, Arthur! The man has intrigued in that direction, but I have never agreed to such a thing.”

“That's all right, then! I was misinformed, and I am awfully—relieved.”

“Oh, it is dreadful of them to say such things of me!” said Rosie in distress: “I am not engaged to Shan O'Shannon, I have never uttered one word to make him think—”

“Well?”

“Well, to be frank, *one* Thursday evening during the week before you came, he encountered me in the south shrubbery as I was coming home from some sick villagers, and urged me so earnestly, that I—don't quite remember what I said. I told him that Mama Gordridge would hardly entertain the thought of my getting married at my age, but that—”

“Tell me?”

“But that—I would think of it, I said.”

“Well, but that was no promise at all,” said Arthur; “you, of course, are not to blame if the man chooses to take all sorts of delusions into his ridiculous brain. Does he fondly imagine, then, that that was a promise?”

"I hardly know," replied Rosie, "for I have tried not to be alone with him again, but he has been so light-hearted since then, that everybody imagines that we are engaged. But ah, we are not."

"Of course you are not. *You* are not made for such as Shan O'Shannon, Rosie. Has he—had this craze in his nut a long time?"

"Yes, he and I happen to be cousins, and they say that since I was six he got it into his brain that I belong to him, and he wouldn't marry anybody, waiting till I grew up. But Nurse Curtis says that you, Arthur, will never let him take me away from the Hall."

"Nurse Curtis was never so right in her life, Rosie . . . Do you see that portrait there?"

"That one?"

"Yes, that with the rapier by the armour. His name was the same as mine—Arthur Fraser, he fought at Blenheim, and was the very best of us all, not only a soldier, but a poet, a politician, a gallant, and, above all, a jolly good fellow: I defy anyone to say less of him. Well, he married a farmer's daughter because it appeared proper to him, because he was pleased to; and it turned out quite bravely, and blood of hers now runs in my veins."

"Yes, Arthur," she murmured, her brow

turned downwards, but the thought rushed athwart her gorgeous head: "That one's mother was not *this* Mrs Gordridge though."

"Well, what *he* did," said Arthur, sitting impulsively up, "I can do, too, for I am nothing like such a swell as he was, and I'm certain that his girl was never half so delicious as mine, nor he ever half so much gone on her . . . Rosie, come to me!"

Rosie stood shaking, looking at the roses incased in her nails.

"Come, will you?"

Rosie would not budge.

"What a dear you are!" breathed Arthur, as it were secretly, leaning towards her in a craze and heat: "do you realise that you are the very nicest thing that was ever created? Those eyes, so large and arch, the throat in cream . . . cruel of you to be so sweet! If you won't come to me, I shall jump up to you . . ."

Rosie tried to speak, but failed.

"What did you say?" asked Arthur.

She tried again, but all that Arthur could catch were the two words: "Mama Gordridge."

"Yes, 'Mama Gordridge,'" said he: "but don't trouble about her now, this is really our own little business only, for all the world are

outsiders, and we two Chinese to everybody. Only be sure that I really do love you—”

“ Oh, it's too much! ” wailed Rosie, suddenly covering her face, whereat he leapt up impulsively and strained her to him, murmuring: “ no, don't be afraid of anything, only let me once know that you love me for my own self.”

“ Can one help it? ” spoke Rosie to his neck, crying, “ I always did . . . ”

“ What, before I came this time? ”

“ Yes, always, I used to cry . . . ”

“ Well, I must have been pretty stupid: I used to see without noticing you, I suppose, a little person with cinderella dresses round spider's pins, eh? never dreaming into what a dear darling you would suddenly dart up . . . ”

“ No, *you* didn't, but this Shan O'Shannon did, notice me, Anne has been so inspired as to observe, and fixed upon me when I was little like that, and waited for me, and therefore, she declares—Oh, they will take me from you, I know, and then I shouldn't know what to do! Mama Gordridge—”

“ No Mama Gordridge: I shan't hear . . . ”

“ If you keep kissing me, I shall get a sore on my lip, and then everybody will know what we have been up to.”

“A sore! why a sore?”

“It’s a strange thing,” said Rosie, half laughing, half crying, “when I was a child, as sure as I played kiss-in-the-ring, so sure I got a sore on my lip.”

“You arch darling! but—”

But they were scared by a cry of feigned surprise in the room made by Anne who had strolled in, whereat Rosie, all inflamed, made her escape, while Anne Hine with her smile remarked: “Why, you are up, Arthur, isn’t it rather soon?”

“I—it is of no importance—what is it, Anne?” asked Arthur.

“A man who is eager to see you is out there, so I came to know—”

“Which man?”

“Shan O’Shannon, Arthur.”

“*Eager?* O’Shannon? to see me? whatever for?” asked Arthur.

“He has brought you—a fish, Arthur, and a brace of partridges.”

“Very charming of Mr O’Shannon . . . Well, you may let him in.”

Arthur returned to his sofa, drew his rug again over his legs, and a moment afterwards Shan O’Shannon entered: a fellow slight, tall,

lithe and light-footed, his eyes light-blue, bright with batteries of fun under a broad brow, one of them somehow looking narrower than the other, adding to their twinkle some wink of knowingness, and to their humour 'cuteness. He came bowing himself down, bright of eye, holding in one hand his cap with a brace of wild-fowl, in the other a four-foot salmon inside a putrod crate . . . "Pleased am I, Mr Arthur, to see you down at last! . . . I don't believe you have wholly ceased to remember me, sir."

"I remember you quite well, O'Shannon," said Arthur.

"Well, you have had a longish bout of it in bed, and understanding that you came down yesterday, I've taken this liberty—"

"That's all right, O'Shannon: you are very obliging. Those for me, I suppose?"

"Well, it seems a cheeky thing, too, to make a gentleman a present of two of the best of his own ground-game, but they came so tempting to the gun just now, I said I'd dare; as for the salmon, that I'm prouder of, for it's pretty difficult to light upon a quite clean one about this season of the year, but this one is just fresh-run."

"Yes, he seems fine. You are—very good. And how are the river and the birds?"

“Birds could hardly be finer, but Severn’s rather late and dry this year, fish haven’t come up plentiful, and the main of the spawning should be far on in November . . . Ah, it’s many a good salmon you and I have landed as lads together, sir . . .”

“I suppose so; yes, that is certainly so; I don’t forget, O’Shannon.”

“It used to be ‘Bull’s-head’ in those first days, sir, not ‘O’Shannon,’ till you got home for your first holidays from Rugby, then ‘Bull’s-head’ turned into ‘Bucephalus,’ for you had learned that ‘Bucephalus’ and ‘Bull’s-head’ are the same words, and it was ‘Bucephalus’ this, and ‘Bucephalus’ that, all over the place.”

“Ah, that was some time ago, I’m afraid.”

“True enough, sir, more’s the grief, for there are no trees so green any more now, nor one can’t ever feel over again for fresh people and scenes the same as for those we originally came across, sir.”

“I suppose not, O’Shannon.”

“You now, Mr. Arthur, no doubt there’s many a gentleman just as fine a fellow, take them all round, as you are, if the truth were only known; but to me they’d never be so, because to my young imagination you were a being to be

looked after and worshipped above all others. It's a foolhardy* thing, too, but let that be my plea for forcing myself upon you, sir."

Arthur, peering under his eyes at Shan, beheld anew the joyous boy whom, because of his priesthood of sky, storm, soil, his naiveté joined with depth, he had once called "patriarchal," cunning to trap, course, climb, the bane of badger, hare, otter, who had been the humble husband of his boyhood. "Bucephalus" had very clearly been doing some reading since then, and now there was a crowded moustache ending in corkscrew undulations; but here was the same brow broad and low, rather treble voice, pale face, dance of eye, flight of foot; and Arthur's inwards warmed with friendship, in spite of his ominous consciousness of Rosie and of crude fruit to accrue.

"How long since you last saw me?" he asked.

"Just six years now," said Shan: "that was at Lydney station on September the 18th, 1893, the night you passed through on your way to India; and I caught a glimpse of you again the night you came home ill on the 2nd, a fortnight ago, but you didn't notice me."

* Foolish.

“ You have quite a memory for dates!”

“ I could give you a statement with dates subjoined for every voyage you’ve taken, and for every page of your life. We have not been so far apart as you may fancy, for here’s your photograph in the Eton jacket which you gave me when you were fourteen and three months: I’ve always kept it in my pocket.”

“ Yes, that undoubtedly seems to be I, O’Shannon—quite so. And—how have you been doing all these years?”

“ Jolly, sir, thank you. Mrs. Gordridge has been marvellously good to me when other folks have had to groan under her pretty cruel rule; I have two married kippurs under me, and I live a free life in the bit of country that I love.”

“ That’s all right, then; and before I go away again I intend to add to your prosperity more than you perhaps expect, O’Shannon, so that you will do quite well on the whole.”

“ It’s the same generous Mr. Arthur as ever, you see!” cried Shan, while a light started to his eyes. “ Not that I have much to crave for, nor would change places now with any man alive, for the streak of luck which I scarcely allowed myself to dream of came to me just the week preceeding your coming—”

“ Oh?”

“ I mean the young girl that during thirteen years and more—No doubt you have seen my cousin, Miss Jones, since you have come down, sir?”

“ I have seen her, of course.”

“ *She* is what Shan-Bucephalus has been the fisher-lad to win for himself, then, though Heaven only knows how such a thing has come about, for it's a long sight beyond what such as I ever had the title to look out for, any way.”

Arthur was silent, till with rather reserved eyelids he murmured: “ Has the girl given her word to marry you?”

“ No, not exactly that, may be, but going on in that neighbourhood, thank God,” said Shan: “ she's young yet, and there's a year or two's waiting to endure, but it will be well in the end.”

“ Provided you contrive to get Mrs. Gordridge's consent, O'Shannon,” said Arthur; “ it is well to be ambitious, but Miss Jones is almost as good as Mrs. Gordridge's adopted daughter, remember.”

“ But, sir, I have every reason to believe that Mrs. Gordridge won't be saying no to this—”

“ Still, Mrs. Gordridge is queer, O'Shannon, Mrs Gordridge is queerish: I should not build any wild hopes—”

“ Yes, but—”

“Well, I am obliged for your presents,” muttered Arthur now, impulsively throwing himself round, turning his back to Shan, and ending the interview, whereat Shan looked at him rather dumbfounded, rather hurt, then placing the presents on a table, bowed, and passed out.

He had already reached the outer hall-region when, to have speech with him, pelted Anne Hine, who after a few moments sent him flying with this whisper pealing in his ear: “Give up hope of Miss Jones, O’Shannon—*there is Another*”; and that same afternoon Mrs. Gordridge, too, was able to gather from Anne that Rosie had been undergoing her son’s embraces in the book-room.

II

SHAN ADANCE

As for the sturdy and sterling President Kruger, God, thirsting to precipitate his presidency, had first spurred him dog-mad. On the 21st the Raad of the Orange Free State, having assembled, in a startling manner manifested jaundice against England, and the night after a Cabinet Council was called in Whitehall in order now to send out another and more wrathful note to the Transvaal. During all which, news of a movement of British troops was being bruited from Natal, troops were en route to Africa from Britain, and clamorous was the rumour of it, for everybody was declaring: "there will be trouble."

"Wouldn't they be put down sharply, those Boers, if *I* had the handling of them!" remarked Mrs. Gordridge to her son during the gloaming of the 23rd, before the dinner-gong had sounded: "how long, Arthur, will the war last when it comes off?"

"Certainly not more than a month, mother," answered Arthur, "they are only a mob."

"Arthur, give me to know definitely now

whether you will be going, if your company is ordered out."

"Not unless I am quite well, mother. We have spoken of that before. I feel no overpowering impulse, really, to help in the mowing down of a crowd of peasants."

"But it is precisely a peasant for whom you are staying behind!"

"This is hardly pleasant, mother," laughed Arthur, walking about; "even if it be on that account, isn't it rather a shame to call Rosie a peasant now? her speech, her throat—it is merely a prejudice: we are all made of the same flesh and blood, after all."

"We are, and yet we aren't, are we, Gross?" said Mrs. Gordridge, chuckling, stroking one of her three Japanese dogs: "I am a peer's daughter, aren't I? and Mr. Arthur has noble blood, and should be good. He will go and butcher Boers or anybody else when his mother begs him to."

"Yes, mother," said Arthur, laughing, "but your habit of governing has become so confirmed at present that it is apt to be grotesque. Do remember one's age. You shouldn't, really. What, for example, has become of poor Rosie these last two days?"

“Hasn't the child been in her own room? I fancy so. . . .”

“What, a prisoner?”

“I recommended her to stay there for the present, and I take it that she has. There's nothing to be shocked at in that.”

“But don't be rough on her, mother, I entreat you, or you force me to interfere. . . . It is so useless, too, for I have really decided to marry her, and you should not try—”

“But who is trying to stop him?” cried Mrs. Gordridge, pointing at Arthur her ebony stick, “I an old dowager with the gout? try to stop a goring bull? Boys will be boys, won't they, Gross? And where the race is pig-headed, the sons will have their way—unless an even pigger head intervenes.” These last words were muttered, as a servant entered to announce “Dr. Blood and the Rev. Mr. Orrock,” visitors who, unloved by Arthur, drove him out to the lawn, where in the twilight he had a talk with the head-gardener, while in Mrs. Gordridge's cosy corner she and her two cronies laid their heads together on the matter of Arthur.

“He doesn't mean to go to any war, I can see,” Mrs. Gordridge said to them: “if I could once get him well off, the moment his back was

turned I should marry Rosie to Shan O'Shannon, and so throw off the whole burden of it. But he very sensibly prefers kissing to camping, so something else will have to be done."

"Moreover, there will be no war," remarked Dr. Blood, a ruddy mass of a man; "Providence will never permit such a scourge."

"He *will* drag in his 'Providence,' you see, Margaret," murmured the clergyman, who was a fair-faced patrician with the fine smile of a prince of the church.

"Let me assure you, Richard," said Dr. Blood heatedly, "that Margaret believes in a God above us, if you do not."

"Margaret," answered the clergyman, "happens to be a woman-of-the-world, and her very proper belief in a God above us is tinctured with all the recent culture and criticism—"

"You are not to squabble, you two," said Mrs. Gordridge: "it is becoming too unbearable, this head-breaking brangle about God and drugs: I wish you wouldn't when I'm about."

"I am done," said Dr. Blood: "though I'd let any fair-minded man decide whether the two positions which I have always taken up are not in accordance with the latest views, namely,

that drugs are a hoary superstition, and that there's a just God overhead."

"Then, why does he daily administer drugs!" cried Mr. Orrock.

"Tell him because one must administer something, John," said Mrs. Gordridge, chuckling: "he administers the sacrament, you administer drugs, I administer the Gordridge family: anything for an honest living."

"It is just a question of the popular prejudice with physicians," said Dr. Blood: "folks insist upon being dosed, and the physician doses them; also there are two or three good drugs, digitalis, quinine; but catch Margaret or me gulping drugs! because I am an enlightened, modern person—"

"Aye, with a belief in ghosts," fleered Mr. Orrock. "The fact, of course, is, that no man really disbelieves in drugs; at this moment I have the advantage to bear within me two tablespoonfuls of blood mixture, four drams of codliver oil, and three little liver pills, whose kindly action—"

"Well, it is a cheap way of dining, Richard," said Mrs. Gordridge: "cheap and nasty."

"You see, Richard, Margaret merely laughs," said Dr. Blood: "talk of superstition! he can't

believe in it! it is merely done to displease others!"

"Superstition should not be considered a crime by a believer in *miracles*," observed the clergyman.

"But doesn't the man preach miracles every Sunday of his life, Margaret?" cried the doctor.

"And you, John," said Mrs. Gordridge, "lead your children to hear him, knowing that he doesn't mean it. There's nothing sound in our society, I say, the whole head's sick. Otherwise, wouldn't I allow Arthur to marry Rosie Jones? But having lost the power to do anything true and genuine through being impregnated in our cradles with humbug and cowardice, we are mainly doctors who scorn drugs, and preachers who jeer at believers, and aristocrats who secretly know that the creed of Keir Hardie is true: so stop your wrangling, and let's go on plotting together against this natural son of mine—I don't mean that he's not born in wedlock, because he was." Mrs. Gordridge chuckled in her jocular dry way, and her two councillors, sagacious enough provided the talk did not touch upon the questions of God and drugs, now laid their heads together anew with her on the war and Arthur. A cloud overhung

that house; and this council of the 23rd was the second, the first having taken place five days before, convened by the old lady in a hurry on hearing from Anne Hine the horrible story of her son and Rosie.

“If Rosie could be sent away to, say, the King-Crolys,” Dr. Blood now said, “without his knowing?”

“Rosie would only write to him,” remarked Mr. Orrock, “and he would fly after her. He must not be given to imagine that we even dream of balking him, or—you know the Gordridges. There must be one master-stroke, effective and final on this side, or we only make matters twenty times worse by meddling.”

“Good,” said Mrs. Gordridge, “but can you suggest the ‘master-stroke’? Let’s *do* master-strokes, Richard, not dream them all day long.”

“It’s a fearful thing!” remarked Dr. Blood.

“I never was confronted with such a crux,” observed Mr. Orrock. “The wonder is that he purposes—wedlock. Wedlock is not the usual solution in such accidents to the affections.”

“Just listen to the gay Herr Faustus,” said Mrs. Gordridge: “he wants Arthur to trifle with that poor child’s life. I shall tell your wife, Richard.”

“No, oh no,” protested the clergyman, “you misunderstand me, I only observe—”

“But supposing he does marry her—” began Dr. Blood.

“Supposing he doesn’t, John!” said Mrs. Gordridge sharply, “it simply will not happen, since I couldn’t endure it, and it is quite useless to suppose what can’t be.”

“But even if Arthur persists in his will to stay at home,” suggested Mr. Orrock, “could not Rosie be secretly married to O’Shannon?”

“It could hardly be done,” replied Mrs. Gordridge. “I have been giving it some thought—not with Arthur anywhere in England; but I’ll tell you what: I believe I could succeed in whipping the lady quietly off to my sister Sheila in Quang Chow, and Sheila could then be counted upon to keep her dark, even if Arthur were to scent her out and fly after her out there—there’s *my* master-stroke: it is bold, but—how does it strike you?”

“Good, good,” said Mr. Orrock.

“Good, good,” added Dr. Blood, “couldn’t be bettered—” this being, indeed, the finish of nearly all the boards-of-three at Glanncourt, Blood and Orrock following with cheers her whom they were called to lead: for, more

masterful and fertile than they, Mrs. Gordridge always first determined her path, and only afterwards, from old wont since her girl-days, invited their guidance.

“ If Arthur can be got to go to the war,” she said, “ it will be better to marry Rosie to Shan O’Shannon than to banish the poor child out to Quang Chow; but if he doesn’t go away, there’s nothing else than the banishment, and it shall be done.”

The gong was now sounding for dinner, Arthur walked in, and the group of five moved toward the dining-room, encountering in a passage Anne Hine, at whom Mrs. Gordridge threw the whisper: “ See yourself about Rosie’s dinner before you sit,” so Anne ran off, arranged this, and then ran upstairs. Rosie’s door was slightly open, the electric-light, supplied by a power-station in the house, had been switched on within, and Anne, approaching warily, was able to spy Rosie with her nicest hat on stepping like a peahen to and fro before a mirror, and now Rosie made a curtsey backward before her own beauty, like dames stooping into profound humiliations before the throne, and now hung up her fingers in the air, and up there exchanged a hand-shake with some perfect personage of her

fancy; all which the prisoner performed with lids rosy from weeping, and Anne, peeping eagerly in, grinned with a grim roguery.

Anne went spryly in, whereat Rosie let slip a cry, and in a moment, the hat flung off, was sitting in her casement.

“What, were you going out, Rosie?” Anne wished to know.

“No, Anne, I had on my hat,” said Rosie, now all gorgeous with blushing.

“I saw that; but whom were you shaking hands with?”

“I? with no one.”

“You are a foolish chick, really, to encourage in yourself such dreams. What can it lead to? I shall inform Arthur of what I caught you doing.”

“Anne, you wouldn’t, would you? you never *would!*”

“I think I shall. What can it matter to you if he laughs at you? He has laughed at *me*, and I haven’t minded, since I do not allow myself any girlish visions, you see, for a girl should learn how to see without tasting, or burning to, miss, women being made to grin and bear, my Rosie, and men to get and grin. Do you know whom Aunt Margaret means him to marry? the

Honourable Peggy Greening who was here in the Spring.”

Rosie sat grum in her window-seat, gazing out at the cedar with its branches bound in chains.

“Peggy herself confessed to me that she is gone on his eyes,” continued Anne, “because they are of such a fabulous blue, she said, and make such a fascinating colour-picture with his sunburnt face. What do you think?”

Rosie made no reply.

“But I think his teeth are too long, Rosie,” proceeded Anne: “they are nice and white, but one of the front ones is irregularly grown, and over-laps; and they are rather too long, don’t you think?”

Rosie said nothing.

“And, really, his brow lacks breadth,” said Anne. . . . “What I like best about him is that bit of bottom-lip shewing between the two wings of his moustache. He has a firm mouth. Yes, that’s beguiling to a girl’s fancy, I think, don’t you?”

“I know nothing about it,” muttered Rosie in a tone almost too low to be heard.

“But it must be confessed that Arthur hasn’t acted quite well toward O’Shannon,” observed Anne: “I heard this afternoon—have you heard?”

“What about Shan O’Shannon now, Anne?” asked Rosie.

“Arthur for some cause or other has turned him off the estate, as I have heard to-day from Mr. Cochrane, has sent him a cheque for £200, and at the same time O’Shannon has received from a gentleman in Somersetshire the offer of a keeper’s place down there, so Arthur must have asked this gentleman to make this offer, for how otherwise could the existence of O’Shannon be known in Somersetshire? I am sorry for poor O’Shannon, aren’t you?”

“Why should I be sorry, Anne? The man is nothing to me.”

“Your cousin, Rosie.”

“Oh, cousins aren’t made in heaven; he will have £200, and a new place. But—has he said anything?”

“The poor fellow is hardly any more in his senses, Rosie, if what old Pruie tells me is true: he has returned Arthur’s money, has written to Somerset to refuse the new place, has lately been seen taking aim with his fowling-piece at trees in the deeps of the brakes, whatever that may mean, and Wallas even doubts whether he is ‘quite right’ in the head this last week. I divine that he may be rather a terrible sort of carle to drive

to extremities, don't you?—and I confess I don't like this firing of his fowling-piece at trees when he believes that no one is about, particularly as Pruie says now that he doesn't eat or go home at night, but roams over the fields like a boggy possessed by fiends. I don't know if this is in any way due to you, Rosie; a girl's play may end in the grimmest earnest, you know—”

But now Rosie broke into tears and anger, crying out: “Oh, go and eat your hat! why should you take a delight in teasing me?” whereupon Anne, hearing Rosie's meal approaching, and seeing Rosie teased to tears, now stole out pleased, and tripped down to her dinner.

III

SHAN IN ACTION

SEPTEMBER moved on towards its end, and darker every hour brooded the war-cloud; from Britain, from India, troopships were crowding the sea-routes toward Africa; President Kruger had dismissed his Raad with the words: "war is certain"; by the 20th the commandos had been mobilized, the railways taken over, the rush from Johannesburg begun; a gold-train was raided and grabbed by the fury of the God-goaded Kruger; and we others were calling out our reserves. Among the army-regiments under marching orders was Arthur's.

Arthur's heart was now divided within him; he could remain behind if he cared to, and had made up his mind to remain: but *after* he had made it up, an outcry had arisen: "We shall lose South Africa!" for the Cape Dutch were shaky, which side the negro might choose was on the knees of the gods, it began to be feared that that flock of cultivators might prove thicker skulls to crack than people had believed, and a wave of warm-heartedness was sweeping out our little lords and landlords, to war. Arthur there-

fore was eager to go and endure hardness with the rest, and he was eager to stay just where he was, in that Rosie Jones was over-sweet. He was pulled both ways many times every day.

But his waverings were solved for him by the way things went at Glanncourt between the 2nd and the 10th of October.

On the 2nd, when a few visitors remained late into the afternoon in the so-called "small" drawing-room at the Hall, Arthur, after talking with them awhile, suddenly on some excuse went away and left them to Anne Hine: the moment therefore that Anne was free, she sped upstairs to see if Rosie was in her room, for she scented a rendezvous, knowing that once before this Rosie had broken prison, and was not surprised to find that Rosie, though there, was evidently preparing for a flight. Anne at once went away with a view to wait upon events, and Rosie, the moment she was once more alone, shot one eye at a little ivory clock, and was up for action, though there were still some minutes to spare, in which she put on three different hats, so placed her mirrors as to be able to inspect her back, and when the spare minutes which beforehand had seemed an age to wait through were fled like one moment in these cares, she now

suddenly found herself late, and was flying to and fro in a flurry of haste, filling the room with her fury to be off.

Now she was outside, and now this keenness all at once yielding to caution, she went on tip-toe, all ears, all leers, a thief in the night, fleet yet shy, till she was down stealing through the drawing-room, then through the conservatory on the western house-wall, whence, taking the plunge into the open, she made one dart northward toward the Old Garden, a seraglio of box-twig arches, in which she wheeled westward, raced down to the very bottom, and down there, between a fernery and a summer-house, found harbour in Arthur's arms.

It was past half-past six of a hazy gloaming, growing dark, and "I daren't stay—only to see you—" Rosie panted on broken breaths.

"There's nearly twenty minutes, don't be afraid—"

"But, dear, Anne—"

"Don't care, sweet, let's think of nothing—for me there's no room for any thought—Do you know, I have been in rather a stew, I was afraid you mightn't come, that some ill-wind might arise somehow—but here you are quite all right—how good and gallant of you—"

“Oh, I don’t feel that this is a good place,” Rosie said, “if anyone were to pass just there at the top of the garden—”

“Let’s go, then, into the shrubbery.”

But at that moment, as they turned, Rosie uttered a sound, for there, gazing at them over the south wall of the shrubbery, some few yards north of them, she saw a face, and she saw a gun-barrel.

A face wrung with many pangs, many passions, that face of Shan. . . .

“God, Arthur, go,” gasped the girl, in one instant ghastly to her lips.

Arthur, too, his eyes tied to that sight on the wall, stood paralysed at it; and even when the gamekeeper with a swing and a spring was over the coping, and in the garden was darting at the pair of gallants, still Arthur with a pale smile remained paralysed, with one hand holding Rosie away

As to Shan, he seemed not to see Arthur at all, but rushing to Rosie, said in a tone of astonishment, “Hello, what’st doing, Rosie?”

A moment afterwards his fingers closed on her right arm in so agonizing a grasp that she could hardly suppress the cry which started to her lips; and as her mouth parted to cry, or ever she had

vented a sound, down upon Shan's knuckles came the cane of her lover.

"What is it, O'Shannon?" said Arthur, "have you taken leave of your senses?"

To this Shan made no reply, drew back a little from the garden-path into a flower-border whose flowers his boots crushed, and, his face hung quite down, dashed his gun to the ground, as if aiming to knock down something with it; and there he remained a little while, swinging his face from side to side, as if not knowing what in the world to do next, while Arthur, palely smiling, looked at him, and Rosie covered her face with both her hands, as if to banish from her sight that which she felt to be coming.

It lasted perhaps half a minute, till Shan, looking sharply up, stepped forward toward Arthur, aying vehemently: "So *this* is how it was."

"O'Shannon," said Arthur, smiling ever at him, "you are to get away at once."

"So *this* is how it was," said Shan again, still more vehemently.

"I have spoken, you know, O'Shannon," said Arthur: words at which suddenly now all Shan's blood swarmed up into his face, till he was almost brown with passion, and out he broke into a cruel laugh, crying: "Yes, the rogues: the

Almighty has spoken! and everybody must go and do as they say, because they are sons of fathers who were murderers and robbers of the earth, and they themselves are so confirmed in robbery, they think it nothing to rob a man's heart out of his bosom—”

“Now, O'Shannon!” said Arthur, cutting this short, his cane smacking his calf: “you must not make yourself a public pest; nothing resembling a wrong has been done you, and you have to take yourself off this instant.”

This again appeared to have the effect of making the gamekeeper fly into yet greater anger, and he cried: “Yes! do as the king says!” and he cast up his arms and stamped, crying: “No wrong! Lord, no wrong!” Then he called Arthur a coward, showing how Arthur had dealt double that morning when he brought Arthur the present of the salmon and partridges: “for,” said he, “it wasn't any Mrs. Gordridge that's ‘queer,’ it wasn't because she's ‘as good as Mrs. Gordridge's daughter,’ and I wasn't to be ‘too ambitious,’ no, it was you yourself that was wambling after her, to her humbling, but you lacked the pluck to splutter what was sick in you, man to man. O, that's bad,” he said, “when a man's not straight, O,

that's ratsbane, that's a grim drug," he said again and again, groaning radically, "O, that's drastic, that's damned."

Arthur so far had said hardly anything, but at last, flushing, he said to Shan: "O'Shannon, you have been told to go away, don't let me have to tell you again, or I shall have to thrash you."

"Will you that?" cried Shan, starting; "don't suppose because we were both born in one night, and you've been sick, I'd keep my hands off you!"

Upon this Arthur, cutting the air once with his cane, said in a final tone: "Now, O'Shannon."

"Thrash away!" cried Shan, "don't be afraid! thee couldn't cut so deep as thee's cut already, shame on thee," and as that "shame on thee" passed his lips, the Rubicon was crossed, two steps darted Arthur to bruise him over the head, while from Rosie's startled heart broke half a cry, half a sob.

"That's good!" shouted Shan as the cane came down, "give'n to me," and as Arthur gave him another athwart the neck, again Shan O'Shannon called, "that's the way! give the dog a lesson!" and once again was the cane raised, though not this third time to strike,

Arthur turning toward Rosie, calling: "Come."

She went after him all with a whitish visage, passing behind Shan, who stood with his brow on the summer-house trellis, and at the north side of the garden they passed under the shrubbery wall, and through a gate into the shrubbery itself, where Arthur said to Rosie: "Don't be afraid any longer, darling, it is all over, and shan't ever happen again—" he being rather short of breath, which she perhaps perceiving, lifted her hand, which he held, so as to kiss his, but in that very act was conscious through every nerve that she was observed, and Shan at her anew. . . .

Shan had come dancing mad, and as tactical as a cat, so that at the instant of that contact between lips and hand, before they could even look, he was between the two, saying: "No, you can't have it all your own way: if thee'st anything of a wight, let's fight it out for her"—and now they could hear his teeth squeak together with eagerness.

"O'Shannon," said Arthur, calmly enough, though he was blanched, "don't you dare molest me, or I'll break every bone in your body."

"That's a cock!" cried Shan, "let's fight for

it, and let the finest lad of the pair take her."

Arthur looked at him under the eyes, and, "Well," he said after ten seconds, "I'll admit now that you have some grounds to feel agrieved, and if you believe that a thorough drubbing will bang it all clean out of you, I am not disinclined to do that much for you."

"But it is *I* who is going to drub *you*, look," said Shan, "if only you hadn't been ailing, if only I was good egg enough to lay the weight of this little finger upon you."

"For shame, Shan O'Shannon, to talk to Mr. Arthur," Rosie with a clearing of the throat now adventured to suggest in a fragile tone of voice, "I shall be sorry for you if you do."

To her Shan gave no answer, but said in an agony to Arthur: "You hear her? that girl? You have turned her all dead against me now! She means to say that you may do whatever you like to her and to me, but if I just dare to touch you, it will be a case of gaol for me."

"No," answered Arthur with a stern face, caning his calf: "no gaol; Rosie will not speak of it, it shall be a secret between us three."

But now she, seeing what was about to come, turned coward, catching at Arthur's arm, saying "Ah, Arthur, do not think of having any-

thing to do with such a brute—" at which word "brute" Shan laughed, and striking on Arthur's shirt-front with his fingers, chuckling, he asked: "I say, is it the best man of the two who shall have her?"

Arthur's face went all wrathful at this, and dashing away Shan's fingers from his chest, he answered: "Yes, I give you my word, the better of the two"—he being a boxer, and it being the essence of his creed that an aristocrat can ever beat and do as he pleases to a plebeian, though Rosie, for her part, knowing something of Shan O'Shannon, understood in her heart that Arthur ought never to have so far pledged himself; however, she had not the chance to say a word, for now Arthur, turning to her, whispered her: "You run away, Rosie, and await me over there behind the bend; I will soon have this brute drubbed humble and tame—" in saying which his moustache brushed Rosie's cheek in a sort of kiss, and in the moment of that touch, Shan shoved his shoulder.

No hard shove—hardly a shove: but in that very moment war broke out; at the sound and view of which thing Rosie fled away from them, having never dreamed that two human beings could be so brutish rude to each other, but soon

ran back to the fracas, then fled away anew, a little way to and fro, distracted, with slight little cries of "O!" and "Help!" and "Don't!" and through all the age that it lasted she was unable to look straight at them, but anon caught glances as through scarlet glasses, seeing blood-guilt, seeing Arthur grounded . . . he appeared not to be able to keep on his feet at all, each time she gave her eyes a peep, there he was, down again, and as down he went, out leapt her thin howl for him. Shan O'Shannon seemed never to miss, to be able to measure his distance as a machine without fail, his two feet moving about as one, never changing their space between, his two fists rolling like wheels in eccentric rotation, his neck twisted somewhat to the right, his eyes fixed to the left upon his enemy with a malign aspect; and thrice the very same thing took place over again, each time with the same grief to Arthur, when Arthur, striking far forth with the left arm and the whole weight of his body a blow, which, if it had caught Shan's face, must have smashed it, Shan dodged it by a duck to the right, and pressing on Arthur's extended left arm with his own left, span Arthur quite round, exposing his left ribs, into which Shan now drove with his own right a pounding

cross-counter which stretched the other low; thrice: and that last time there followed an omen of disaster that Rosie, though at that moment some distance off, was distinctly aware of—a crackling, like the brittle breaking-in of a box, a little uproar of broken ribs; after which it was a full minute before she was able to look at all that way again, and then, looking, she saw Arthur lying quite quiet on the ground, and she saw Shan O'Shannon crouched by the side of Arthur, with his throat strained right back, poring straight up at the clouds, howling out "Oh-h, Oh-h, Oh-h," like a hound howling over the drowned. In some moments, however, he sprang up and went running past Rosie like a wild thing without his hat, holding his brow between both his hands, and immediately after him she, too, scared out of her wits to be all alone with what lay there quite quiet on the ground, rushed with her wild white face round into the garden-path out of the shrubbery, gibbering something where there was no one near to hear her.

Now, Anne Hine, meantime, was out, had passed through the top (east) part of the Old Garden at about the very time when, unseen by her, Arthur and Rosie before the fight were

leaving the bottom part of it in order to enter the shrubbery, and shun the presence of Shan; in ignorance of which, with eager ears and prospect, Anne ran on across the road which separates the Old Garden and the New, and passed into the New through a gate in its great wall. Her eyes ran through the enclosure, which was not thickly wooded, and catching no sight of Rosie and Arthur, she thought to herself, "they are in the rockery"—a grotto all adrip round a pond of gold-fish at one end of the row of hot-houses under the north garden-wall—and thither Anne made, strolling now, lingering to gaze over a flower or plum-espalier, lest any eyes in her hot-houses, chancing to see her, might divine her spying mind.

She passed into the hot-houses by the east entrance, walked through the peaches, orchids, bananas, the vinery, and, stepping over the rocks in the fish-pond, emerged at the western extremity of the houses without having encountered a soul, so back, southward she now returned with brisker feet and an even keener appetite to find out what was what, and in which deep nook sweetmeats were being eaten that evening.

She was soon to know, since, as she once more got out into the road between the two gardens,

she met an old body known as "Pruie," Shan's housekeeper, and noticing rather a ghastliness in Pruie's skin, Anne asked her what was wrong.

This old Pruie replied: "It's Mr. O'Shannon! I have just come on him—lying—"

"Catch your breath!"

"Under that beech-tree on the rise above we; when I did speak to'n, him didn't make no reply, and when I did shake'n, er did only moan—"

Anne's quick instincts working urgently two seconds, in the third she said: "Is he hurt?"

"Him do have some cuts. . . ."

"I'll go to him," and at once she passed into a gate in the north shrubbery-wall, in order to race through the shrubbery as the nearest way to the "rise," but in speeding down a path in the shrubbery, the sound of a rush of footfalls crushing through crisp leaves of Autumn caused her to look round to her right, and down in an alley she saw Rosie arise out of haze, flying with a wild face. A moment more, and Rosie was moaning on her shoulder.

"What, not in your room, Rosie?" said Anne; "whatever is the matter?"

"He is half killed—!"

"Not Arthur?"

“ I left him on the ground—I couldn’t stand it—”

“ But don’t be hysterical! just tell one what has happened. You see now, Rosie—”

“ He is on the ground, he didn’t reply when I spoke to him—”

“ Come shew me—”

“ Down there in the round place—”

Both now bolted down an alley until Rosie, pointing at a spot on the road, panted: “ there! ” but nobody was to be seen when they came to the spot, only someone’s cap lying on the ride; and by the twilight still reigning between the trees Anne was able to perceive blood-smears on some leaves.

“ There is no one,” said Anne with surprise, and now the other, without making any reply, failed and fainted quite away, whereat Anne gripped and lowered her down, and, crouching to hold her up, murmured over the unconscious girl: “ Yes, it’s a darling penny-farthing face, and the lips are just made for playing Box and Cox with Arthur’s; but they mustn’t, the gods and I be jealous. This serves you right, and him, too, for forbidden fruit isn’t all honey of Hybla, you see, and I’m rather glad in my heart, whatever it is that has happened. . . . There’s blood

on the ground . . . if a little could be drawn in a sound trouncing from miss, too, that should prove cooling to the passions. It's blood that makes romance, and I have none, scarcely enough to make me yuck and sicken for more. . . . Come, you've got to get up, I can't stay here all night admiring you. She is quite wannish now, looking as divine as whitish violets; if I could love, I'd devour her mouth. . . ."

Rosie, being shaken, now unfolded her large orbs, and stared about.

"Where is Arthur?" asked Anne.

"There!" cried Rosie, indicating the place where she had left him lying.

"But he isn't, you see. Come, pull yourself together, Rosie."

"Has he got up? "

"Evidently."

"I must have fainted. . . ."

"Come, try to get up. Let us go that way and look."

Anne grasped Rosie's arm while again they ran, this time into the Old Garden, where, though no Arthur was visible there, more marks of blood showed that he had gone that way, and when they had rushed across the garden, they beheld the back of someone resembling him

through the evening murks just entering the conservatory, apparently with very staggering feet, for the figure seemed to reel from side to side.

By the time they got to the house, the figure was again out of sight, had gone in, and Arthur had been taken up to his apartments by some flunkeys, one of whom Anne met pelting down the stairs to send for Dr. Blood.

A few moments afterwards both Anne and Mrs. Gordridge were at Arthur's bed, the rumour of it had gone out, and the Hall was all in a hush of awe, no one having any notion how it had happened, for Arthur, in a half-unconscious way, could not, or would not, answer any questions.

Having tasted of a late and lonely dinner, Anne then made her way to Rosie's room, saying on her entrance, "There's no necessity for so much distress, Rosie,"—for Rosie was stretched on her sofa, still inconsolable—"besides his broken ribs, he has two black eyes, it is true, with quite a kaleidoscope of bruises, and has been well peppered on the whole, but Dr. Blood declares that he will be up in some days. . . Come, tell me about it. . . ."

Rosie now tried to dry her eyes, and slowly told the whole story.

“Well,” said Anne, having heard, “thank Heaven, there has been no murder, as there might easily have been; anyhow, the fight clears the air, for you now definitely revert to Shan O’Shannon, Rosie, it would seem, by right of conquest.”

“Do I?” answered Rosie, drying her eyes: “I’ll shew him reverting.”

“But since Arthur gave his word,” remarked Anne, “that, of course, is final for him. . . . I must go back to him. . . .”

“But, Anne, you won’t tell that it was Shan O’Shannon, will you? Arthur said that I wouldn’t—”

“No, I don’t intend to tell—” and now Anne sped away down to play her part in all the pother of the house.

IV

SHAN MAKES A VOW

IT was on that same day that Shan and Arthur fought that President Stein forwarded to Sir Alfred Milner a note giving him to know that he was mobilising his burghers; whereat, some days afterwards, on this side, reserves for our first army-corps were called out; Parliament was summoned: and from that to the war was an affair on only some three or four days.

All those eight days before the outbreak of war, Arthur had lain abed, for the paws of Shan had proved bruising; and still Shan was as large, for Arthur would not tell out how he had got his flogging.

“I wonder why he won’t tell,” Mrs. Gordridge said to Anne Hine, on the 6th (October), three days before the Boer ultimatum: “but it could have been nobody except Shan O’Shannon; and O’Shannon must be sent to Gloucester for it.”

“I fancy, Aunt,” said Anne, “that Arthur may have promised O’Shannon before the fight not to take any steps—”

“Nonsense, the man must be properly punished,” said the old lady; “he has my ad-

miration, of course, for, if I had been he, I should have acted just as he has; but, then, I am not he, and, being myself, I want my paltry revenge."

"You are *quite* right, Aunt, as you always are," remarked Anne.

"Who ever heard of such an impertinence?" asked the old lady: "I am a Socialist myself, but I'll permit nobody on the estate to presume to share my views. O'Shannon shan't be at large another day, so send presently to the village, and tell Morgan I want him."

"Yes, Aunt. But suppose Arthur goes to the war, after all? it might be convenient to have O'Shannon here to marry Rosie . . ."

"But what puts it into your head that Arthur may go to South Africa now?" asked Mrs. Gordridge.

"I have a fancy that he may," answered Anne: "he has been keen on the newspapers the last day or two—"

"Oh, everybody lying abed is keen on newspapers. He isn't rushing out to any war; and I have made up my mind to pack Rosie off to Sheila in Quang Chow."

"Quite so, Aunt—unless Arthur were to scent her out out there. . . . The safest of all, it strikes

me, would be her marriage with O'Shannon, for nothing can get over the fait accompli of marriage; and it is quite on the cards that Arthur will go in the excitement, if war does break out: you wait and see: he is disgusted with everything for permitting himself to be drubbed, and seems to have really given up Rosie for the moment."

"Hasn't he made any effort at all to see her since the struggle?" asked Mrs. Gordridge.

"No, Aunt; he has sent her one note by Price, I know, but it couldn't have been a very hopeful one, for she has been specially crabapplish ever since; I haven't seen it, she keeps it somewhere about in the region between blouse and chemise."

"You are not to spy upon that poor child, Anne," said Mrs. Gordridge with a cross mouth, "I can't bear a snake-in-the-grass. . . . But it's odd that he hasn't wanted her to go to him, he must be waiting till he gets well again. It would be interesting to know what was in that note of his; just try to find out; girls should be able to worm out things without exactly being snakes-in-the-grass. . . . No, he isn't going out to any South Africa, no such freak of luck, so do what I tell you as to O'Shannon, and have Morgan here."

“Aunt,” said Anne, “you are *sure* to be right,” and to herself she added: “Darling old blinkard, you are always too bunged up with self-will to have the least insight into other people’s minds.”

Anne herself walked down to Albington that afternoon to see Morgan, the bobby, and though Morgan was not then to be found, the morning after, the 7th, he walked up to the Hall, and had a talk with Mrs. Gordridge; and now those clouds which lowered over Shan’s brow gathered angrily to burst upon it, not without wide whispers and murmurings, in spite of the furtiveness with which the first measures were entered upon. By noon of the 9th the policeman was at Shan’s place with his piece of blue paper.

But it was one thing to go to arrest Shan, and another thing to arrest him. During the gloaming of the 10th, Anne broke into the room of Rosie, who had morosely got sick, brimming with the story of the struggle which had been going on at Shan’s cottage, going on in the shrubberies, going on actually among the rocks in the brook, during two long days: on the first of which Shan had fled, and there had been no catching him, than on a sudden he had offered himself, and had said, “take me, if you can.”

“They, haven’t got him even now,” said Anne Hine all in a glee, “I have been looking on among the crowd from the tump of the Morple-piece, and he has been giving the whole four of them beans.”

“But the man must be mad, shame ought to cover his face,” remarked Rosie.

“He isn’t bad,” observed Anne Hine with her tart smile: “he peppers them all well: if I was a girl of the people, that’s the gallant the turn of my fancy might find pleasing.”

“But what can he mean by carrying on like a mad thing, upsetting the whole place like this, and Mama Gordridge been always so good to him? shame ought to cover his face: he is only making it hotter for himself.”

“I know the poor fellow’s motive,” answered Anne: “he fancies that it is Arthur who is prosecuting him after promising not to, and this has embittered and turned him turbulent.”

“But does Arthur know of it?”

“Not a syllable: Aunt Margaret won’t have him told; but that is what O’Shannon believes, I am convinced, and his rebellion against the queen is really a raging against Arthur; I can quite divine the man. Old Pruie says that he has groaned ‘false’ to himself in the night-time: so

that's it. He doesn't suspect that Arthur starts to-morrow—I suppose you know, Rosie, that war has been declared to-day?"

"War has? I hadn't been informed."

"And Arthur is off out to fight, Rosie."

"Arthur is?"

"Yes, Rosie."

"To fight, is he?"

"Yes, no more Arthur now. I have only this moment been told, and pelted to tell you. . . . He is still in bed, but means to get up in the morning, and will start in the evening."

"But not *to-morrow* he won't start?"

"Yes, to-morrow; but you still have a whole night in the same house with him—there she goes, all ghastly: don't be a goosie, now, Rosie; it is only like wanting chocolat Ménéier for breakfast, and not being able to get it."

Rosie stole all on ache to her casement, nothing more remaining to her now, her day suddenly dark and done, and such a sound of distress gushed out of her, that Anne ran and hugged her a little, saying, "goosie, you must take it standing up, it isn't so much, the trouble won't last a month, and nobody is to be butchered, then he will return nice and sun-burnt, and there'll be more bon-bons, may be—"

“Anne, don’t,” replied Rosie in pain, “I’m only a poor orphan all out in the cold without father or mother, I have nothing to do with anything, nothing is any affair of mine. . . .”

“Silly,” said Anne, pinching her chin: “I didn’t think you’d cut up so badly: don’t I assure you that you’ll soon see him. . . .”

But in this Anne proved not so shrewd a prophet as she usually was, for the “troop of boors” meant to approve themselves brave men and a famous foe, so that, save when Rosie caught a back-view of Arthur for a moment from her casement on his departure for the station, she saw him no more for many a month. He left for his love one little last letter, in which, however, were no vows, nor one hope held out of happiness in store: and he went away.

It was five of a wild gloaming, the 10th of the month, that gloaming momentous with war in the memory of many, the heavens all amove on a voyage of heaviness, like caravans with convoys, and armies on the march with baggage, all gloomily bugled by north-winds. Arthur started off on foot for the station together with Anne Hine and his man, Price,* one piece of sticking-

* Everybody there being named Price.

plaster still adhering there on his right cheek, while Mrs. Gordridge, with Dr. Blood and the Rev. Mr. Orrock, eyed him till he disappeared behind the stables. A little beyond the stables he passed through a little iron gate betwixt the north-west covert and the home-farm, whence one path went south into the turnpike road, and so to the village, and a second plunged west down a broken bit of ground, at the bottom of which wound the brook; this latter was much the nearer way to the station, but just here Anne suggested the village-way.

“No, I want to have some time to see to the trunks and things,” replied Arthur: “we’ll go over the Morplepiece—unless you have some reason?”

“I am not sure of it now,” was Anne’s answer, “but I *fancy* that Aunt Margaret might prefer you to go by the village-way.”

“Mysterious chit you are, Anne,” remarked Arthur: “ever with some secret streak in your mind’s eye to smile to yourself over: you have the genius of the Russian court. . . . Whyever should mother have any preference?”

“It doesn’t matter,” muttered Anne: “let us take the Morplepiece way, since you like. . . .”

The country thereabouts is extremely broken,

all mountains, and this Morplepiece a meadow climbing like a bowl on the farther bank of the brook, some way up the brook-valley on a spur of the Morplepiece being Shan's cottage, with the pheasant-pens and the woodard's cottage: so that Arthur had not gone far down the broken ground in the direction of the brook before he began to come upon tokens of the brigue still going on between Shan and the queen. First, under an oak he observed lying in a pile the five bikes that had brought over one of the Lydney and four of the Ebbstow police, then he came upon a cart waiting ready to receive the rebel, then, where the wood cleared a little down by the brook, could see the crowd on the tump of the Morplepiece, and lastly, some yards from Shan's cottage, could see the very press of battle—the six bobbies and something tumbling in their midst. They had won Shan into the open at last, and the end was near now.

“What is it all about?” asked Arthur, stopping to look at the little scene far off.

“It is O'Shannon being arrested, Arthur,” answered Anne: “this is the third day that they have been trying to take him, and can't. First there was Morgan from Albington alone, then another one came, then two more, and now

there are six of them. I am glad to see you look so pleased, I'm sure. . . ."

"Pleased about what?" asked Arthur quickly.

"How should I know? I dare say you are feeling that it is no disgrace for one man to be thrashed by a gallant who can thrash six."

"Who has been thrashed by whom? What has this O'Shannon done to be grabbed by these police people?"

"Grievous bodily harm, it is said, Arthur."

"To whom?"

"To you, it is said, Arthur."

"But—why have I been told nothing of this before?"

"Aunt Margaret—" began Anne, but now a noise of voices among the mob of loiterers on the Morplepiece maundered down the valley on the breezes, for Shan had just been floored, whereat Arthur, without waiting to hear more, hastened over the slab-bridge of the brook, and northward up a foot-path to the scene of the fracas. He found Shan down on his back with his chest gasping beneath two of the policemen's knees, the other men trampling about him like a group of people scrambling for pennies, everyone with drabbled garments and bloody sweats, particularly the poor prisoner, who, all red and ragged,

was very grimly mauled; but at the sight of Arthur there was a slight pause and suspending of effort, for the men all knew him well, and he said to them, caning his calf, "well, but what is all this, men?"

"Taking Shan O'Shannon for the assault on you, sir," panted Morgan, a fatty mass of matter, not fit for too much fisticuffs.

"This is odd," said Arthur: "on whose charge is the man to be tried?"

"On Mrs. Gordridge's, sir."

"I see. . . . But on what evidence? I never told anyone that the man had assaulted me; in fact, you are to let him alone, he hasn't assaulted me."

"But then, sir—" began Morgan.

"Just come here," said Arthur, who had stopped some yards short of the struggle, and, having drawn Morgan apart, he impressed it upon him that O'Shannon was on no account to be imprisoned, put into Morgan's hand some gold, and ran back down the path with a glance at his watch, muttering as he met Anne Hine, "great nuisance, I have lost eight minutes now, we shall have to hurry; perhaps you had better go back, Anne. . . ." Anne, however, went still some way with him up to the tump of the Morple-

piece and beyond, till the pace became too great for her, when she was hurriedly kissed by Arthur, who said to her, "good-bye, take care of yourself and of mother, and—just look after poor Rosie for me, won't you?" "All right," said Anne Hine, "take care of yourself, meliorque revertere." "Within four months, I hope," answered Arthur, and he and his man went away in haste.

By this time the policemen, having laid their heads together, had agreed among themselves as to how the land lay, Shan was provisionally at large, most of the crowd gone away, and Anne was almost down at the brook once more on her way home when she noticed Shan in some bush on the other shore, with his nose to a beech-bole which he was holding with both his arms; he seemed to be beating his already bruised brow upon the bark of the beech, for his delivery from the law by Arthur had very powerfully moved Shan; and the sly Anne, with her insight into the mind of her neighbour understanding that this must be the case, and impelled by her passion for pinching and playing the Puck to pain, passed close to Shan, and remarked: "it is you, Mr. O'Shannon."

Shan glared round at Anne with a gaze of

sorrow, the sour grumness of gaze of the ox struck down in the ring, without making any answer.

“I am so glad, Mr. O’Shannon,” she said, “at the lucky way things have gone: I only trust it will be a lesson to you never more to encourage morose and rebellious emotions. You see, Lieutenant Gordridge, for his part, was wholly ignorant of the charge made against you, and the moment he knew he most magnanimously gave himself the pains to save you, though he might quite well have felt inclined to stand aloof in such a case.”

Still Shan stood dumb.

“Well, all’s well that ends well,” Anne went on: “I take it that the whole misery has arisen through a mistaken notion on your side of Lieutenant Gordridge’s motives, for you grossly misjudge him if you imagine that he meant to trifle at all with Rosie Jones. There is no better fellow, no more gracious and noble spirit than Lieutenant Gordridge, and it must grieve him, I think, that *you*, of all people, should have misjudged him.”

“What are you saying, Miss Hine?” Shan at last asked.

“What I know,” replied Anne with her

smile: "poor Lieutenant Gordridge had a really very serious regard for Rosie Jones, and has frequently expressed to Mrs. Gordridge his will to marry her immediately."

"Marry?"

"Why, yes, though that's all over and done with now—through *you*. Since your mauling of him, he has not even once seen her, owing to some undertaking made to you, I believe, and you can conceive, can't you, what they both have borne. Did you notice Lieutenant Gordridge just now, how very gaunt he is looking? As you are aware, he was always a spoiled child, he gets quite sick if his whims are foiled, and this time a heart of iron might have felt for him, night after night, all night, he has paced his chamber with bare feet, peevishly pining after Rosie Jones, so Price says, and it is *you*, Mr. O'Shannon, who has driven him desperate now, and sent poor Lieutenant Gordridge out to the war."

"War?"

"Surely you know that Lieutenant Gordridge is just off to join his regiment, in order—Why, what is it?"

Shan looked electrified, started away from his tree, asking, "is it the 5.25?"

“ Yes, but—”

But Shan was gone.

Pelting, he glanced at his watch—it had been smashed; he pulled up half a second, cast up his arms, distracted; then, catching sight of three bicycles lying under a tree, ran and whipped one of them to his shoulder, ran with it over the brook, ran with it up to the tump, and bestriding it at the top, with wild winds behind his back was swept away down in a cloud of dust.

He was just in time, on dashing into the tiny station, to find the train there ready to be off, and ran by the side of it, a wild-looking sight with his batteries and rags, till he came to the compartment wherein Arthur sat snug in wraps and rugs; and now Shan wrenched at the door-handle—it was bolted; he beat at the window; and Arthur, letting it down, leaning out from his seat, said, “ well, now, O’Shannon. . . .”

Shan was so fearfully moved that he could hardly speak, precious as his moments were. “ I’m only a poor chap,” were the first pants which Arthur could catch, and he murmured, “ yes, yes, be quick.”

“ I didn’t know,” said Shan with catches of the breath, “ I took it that you were not quite

downright square with her, and you look pretty pale now, but I didn't know—”

“Don't bother now, O'Shannon,” said the other.

“But hear a poor chap out, I'm only a poor chap—”

“Well, what is it?”

“You don't realize all, look,” Shan contrived to say; “from my childhood, a fetich in my heart, you'd hardly imagine, if you don't know, you and her, the two of you, no one knows, and what have I dared do now, and how you have paid me for it, it's painful. . . .”

“I see how it is. Well, then, here's my hand: now there's no bad blood left. . . .”

“But you stay here,” Shan breathed at his fetich's ear, “stay and—”

“Well?”

“Take her.”

“Rosie! You say that?”

“Yes, that's serious, take her: I have said it.”

“Well, that's wonderfully decently said!”

“Aye, that's quite serious, you take her: when a thing's once said, it's said, and when a thing's once done, it's done.”

“But still—no,” muttered Arthur, “after

all, I have given my word, she is yours now, I suppose, and altogether I wish you joy."

"Always a brick! But you want her, don't you? Who can escape it? it's pitiful. . . . And—I hand her back to you "

"I say, O'Shannon, you are, really—wonderfully decent."

"Yes, that's serious, I've said it now."

"But still, I'm bound now, it seems, to go to the war—"

"Are you? Well, no doubt you are; of course, you are. Go, then, and I tell you what, I'll—look after her for you till the day you get back."

"Thank you, you are wonderfully good, thank you, thanks. But, I say, O'Shannon, come now, is that a promise upon which one may rely?"

"Yes, I've said it."

"I'll be back anyway in four months. . . ."

"As soon as ever you like, I don't mind, the sooner the sooner over for me, after all: she shall be yours when you come—say in four months' time."

"That's a compact, then; I only hope that I'm not taking advantage of a moment's generous impulse—no, I think not, that's all right, for you would hardly send one away inflated with expectations which you did not fully

intend to sustain for one. Listen, O'Shannon: it seems beastly to say now, but may be I'd better say it out: she's hardly—eager to have you in that way, you could never get her quite easy and satisfied; facts are hard things, not always as we would ordain them, so there is nothing like reconciling oneself to them with a good grace, eh? So for *her* sake—Well, good-bye, thanks, thanks, don't forget—!”

For the station-master, who would no longer wait, had waved his flag, and Shan ran forward with the running train, grasping Arthur's hand, till the rate gathered and still gathered greatness, and left him there, and swept his friend away; but still he lingered on, gazing long over the rails, and at last turned to move homeward in so hopeless a mood of bereavement, so robbed and hollow of spirit, that when a policeman, meeting him at the cross-roads, morosely demanded his “machine,” Shan let the machine crash down at the man's feet without speech, and moved on with a drooped brow.

In passing down the Morplepiece to his house, he was seen an instant by Mrs. Gordridge, who said of him to Anne Hine: “But what about Shan O'Shannon's arrest? I declare I had forgotten all about the man in the excitement...”

She with her small court was at the far end of the stretch of land called The Meadows—a park really, though almost bare of trees in the middle—from which far end a piece of the railway was to be seen, and, watching the place where she had seen the train bear Arthur away, she was still waiting for nothing underneath the trees there, when for an instant she saw Shan.

Anne now told the story of how Arthur had gone to the rescue of Shan on his way to the train, to which Mrs. Gordridge made answer: “That is all right, then, for since Arthur declares that the man is innocent, of course he is, and I’ll forgive him, if he is properly repentant. After all, Shan O’Shannon is part of the place, a most worthy person in his way, and, moreover, a man can’t be cast out anyhow who is about to be a husband.”

“Right,” said the Rev. Mr. Orrock.

“And the quicker a husband the better,” said Dr. Blood: “for this war won’t last four weeks, I foresee.”

“O’Shannon shall be married before the war has well begun,” said Mrs. Gordridge, “for I don’t believe in running risks, and leaving loopholes to chance.”

“Right!” repeated the clergyman: “though

personally I believe that the war will last six months."

"Four weeks, sir," repeated Dr. Blood.

"Here is a man," remarked Mr. Orrock, "who once said that it would never happen at all; I think he mentioned, if my memory is not at fault, that Providence would never permit it."

"Pardon me," replied Dr. Blood, "what I did say was, that, if Providence did permit it, it would never permit it to last, and what I have said I stick to."

"Yes, *your* Providence is a benevolent old soul up in the sky, who swoons at the sight of blood," replied Mr. Orrock.

"Well, Arthur is gone to the war," sighed Mrs. Gordridge to herself, gazing at the stretch of railway far off, "God go with him."

"Listen, Richard, listen," whispered Dr. Blood: "*she* believes, if you don't."

"Don't pretend not to comprehend," answered the clergyman, with a rosy flush: "she believes, yes, but in a modern tone—which is all the difference. I also have every hope that God will go with him, for he goes, to begin with, with a box of bile beans which I myself placed in his waistcoat pocket—"

"Ach Gott!" chuckled Dr. Blood bitterly,

“bile beans above every other abomination: catch Margaret or me gulping—”

“You are not to brangle, you two!” Mrs. Gordridge sharply said: “it’s a marvel that you don’t begin to grow weary of it. . . . Come on, he’s gone, it’s no use waiting here staring at two rails”—and with her court and dogs after her, the old lady hobbled off on her ebony stick for the Hall.

V

SHAN IN A NET

THE morning following Arthur's departure for the war was so warm, though in mid-Autumn, that Mrs. Gordridge that morning "administered the Gordridge family" from an arm-chair in a summer-house—that same Old Garden summer-house close by which one evening Shan had swept down like a wheeling wind upon the meeting between the sweethearts. Thither Anne Hine had led the old lady's gouty toes, and stayed by her side while out of her island of shade she gazed at the blaze of light in which basked the arches flowers and bowers of the garden, and while one after the other she gave interviews to her land-steward, head-gardener, lady-housekeeper, to Morgan, the policeman, and sipped out of her glass of egg-nog, and was good and cruel capriciously to her Jap dogs. It was half-past eleven when, sighing free of all this, she said to Anne Hine: "Well, where is Rosie Jones? did you tell the child that I want her?"

"There she is just passing through the gate, Aunt," replied Anne.

“All right, you go away a little.”

“Yes, Aunt,” and Anne went, those two pencil-lines like brackets round her mouth expanding in a mincing little smile as she passed by Rosie on a path: for she knew what pill was in store now for poor Rosie’s throat.

Rosie ran hatless, a halo of glare entangled in that golden snare of her hair, her sorrow in her gaze, and now at the summer-house door was asking, “Yes, Mama Gordridge?”

“Kiss me,” said Mrs. Gordridge.

Rosie went in and did this.

“Sit there,” said Mrs. Gordridge, and Rosie being seated at her feet, wondering what now, with apprehensive eyebrows, as she shot flying glances up, Mrs. Gordridge added, “tell me: what are all the red eyes about?”

Rosie made no reply, tears springing to her eyes, her lip shaking, so the old lady pinched her cheek, saying: “This comes of locking you up like a prisoner, poor girl, and now the roses are gone all withered, though richly watered no doubt with showers out of the sky in the eyes—what? Well, but all’s well that ends well! So long as you are perfectly certain that it was no doing of *mine* . . .! since I only work for everybody’s happiness, and have to carry everybody’s

burdens, so as to keep people from blundering and miscarrying; and what everybody will do when I am dead Heaven only knows. I *had* to lock you away from that hurricane, you know—not that I blame him one bit, for you're undoubtedly a sweet little piece of pig-meat, good to eat between the teeth, and if I was a boy, I'd be after you myself, no doubt; but that gave me all the greater grounds for acting grimly, and may be you haven't been so weeping a captive, after all, for haven't you been out of the house to meet him once—or oftener?"

From Rosie's bent face rose no breath in answer.

"I am not angry; let me hear."

"Yes, then, Mama Gordridge."

"Ah, you see, you can't hide much from me: I know what you are thinking about in your bed at night when the lights are out. . . . So—how often did you meet him?"

"Twice."

"You see: I knew. And—whereabouts did you meet him?"

"There, by the summer-house."

"Exactly. . . . I have done the same thing myself before I was even sixteen, so don't be so simple as to think that I am cross at anything,

except at your supposing that I didn't know all. Why ought I to be cross? Don't you cry, it is all over now, and in three weeks and a half from now you will have forgotten all about it in your new home with your own husband."

"Who will, Mama Gordridge?" asked Rosie, staring up with eyes of scare.

"Why, what's the immoderate surprise about?" asked Mrs. Gordridge with a show of surprise: "aren't you about to marry your cousin Shan?"

"I am, Mama Gordridge?"

"But isn't that so, Rosie—dear? That's what I took for granted! Is there any other solution which you can suggest?"

Rosie, as if she heard in some dream, sat twisted, staring up, unable to breathe a word, her face bleeding inwardly away, till she stared mere lily-flesh. Here was the last end of all her lingering dream of Arthur, and good-bye to everything, and such was her greatness of dismay, that over those glaucous eye-balls of Mrs. Gordridge the lids closed down a moment to shut out the sight of it, and she bent aside to sip, muttering with some impatience: "I hope you are not going to behave like a martyr, girl, for you must see that, though this war has come as a

merciful thing to pick us all out of a tight place, since it will not be lasting long, Arthur will soon be back upon us, and if you are not then well married off, there may be no end of a rumpus: so you see why—you see why. . . .” Now, however, Rosie was suddenly down on her knees, pleading, “ Oh, please, Mama Gordridge, don’t allow me to go through this, please!”

On this, Mrs. Gordridge, her eyes averted from that perfect heart-cry, scratched the neck of a dog, then drew Rosie to a stool, drew Rosie’s head to her shoulder, and smoothed and soothed it, cooing: “ Foolish old thing! What, wouldn’t you like to be a sweet little wife? Or is it that you don’t like this Shan O’Shannon?”

“ Oh, I don’t wish to be married!” went Rosie.

“ What, not to be a mistress of your own home? and have a pink pickaninny to spank and pamper? and a hulking husband to bully and stamp at? and to be always near your mama? for I shan’t ever let you be far from my side.”

“ But oh, not to Shan O’Shannon, I couldn’t stand Shan O’Shannon!” cried Rosie.

“ Why, since when?” asked Mrs. Gordridge: “ you liked him well enough before you got bitten by Arthur, you were aware that I had

given you to him, and you gave your assent to it. You see, it is only a whim. . . . We women are such fowl to imagine that our craze for trousers in general is a craze for one particular pair! Why, I didn't like my husband when I married him! I was mad after a dancing little barrister man! but I soon understood that Julius Gordridge was as good for me as anybody, for it is the duty of a woman to use her head, too, a little, and you will soon be quite fond—”

“ Ah, never!”

“ But, Rosie? you contradict me, Rosie? I tell you that you will: do you imagine, then, that I don't know? But since you disdain O'Shannon for the moment, I should gladly get you some other mate, only where's the time? We should have to find the man, he would have to court you a little—before all which was over Arthur would be back upon us, and all the fat in the fire; so it can only be O'Shannon, you see. And isn't O'Shannon a lad that any girl should be glad of? sober, but no gawk, quick on the legs, larky with his knuckles and with the girls, they say—look what mince-meat he turned poor Arthur into, and how he tackled those six louts of policemen—”

“ Oh, Mama Gordridge, you have forgotten

how a girl feels," pouted Rosie, her brow on Mrs. Gordridge's shoulder.

"I?" breathed Mrs. Gordridge, shrinking: "what, am I so old? It is only like last week that I was flirting! I feel like thirty! And have I got to that now to 'forget how a girl—'? Well, how the young do look down upon the old, just as the rich do upon the poor, or as English people upon negroes. . . ."

"No, Mama Gordridge, I didn't mean—"

"But the thing is this, child, that the well-being of Arthur, and mine, depends upon this business: well, when I say that, what answer can you find to make to me?"

Rosie could find no answer to make to her, but a sob broke from her bosom.

"Well, then, let us take that as settled; and now—Well, what is it, James?"

She spoke now to a man, who, coming to present a note on a tray, remarked that Underkippur Price had asked him to give it, a note which, as Mrs. Gordridge's eyes moved over it, caused her mouth to go cross, and produce a sound of worry:—A note from Shan: referring to the corn-account, the pens, with a word as to poultis and wild-bred cocks, and the dividing of the work between the under-keepers, he, Shan,

being off that very day with his belongings, seeing that he had previously received warning from Lieutenant Gordridge to quit, and was going accordingly. . . .

“ Kiss me,” said Mrs. Gordridge to Rosie the moment she had read it . . . “ now run away, we’ll go more into it this evening,” and, Rosie gone, she whispered with a certain eagerness to the serving-man: “ Run down to the head-keeper’s house, and say I want to see him here.”

Anne Hine, meantime, who had been pacing among the flower-beds, on noticing that pale thing that Rosie now was, pelting for the house to find some hole to cry in, came back to the summer-house, but was anew sent away by Mrs. Gordridge, just as the flunkey got back short of breath with the message that O’Shannon was hardly fit to be seen by a lady that day, being so gashed up (by the police), so would Mrs. Gordridge say in a message—

“ Go away,” said the old lady, “ tell Miss Hine there to come,” and to Anne herself she said: “ Fly down to O’Shannon’s cottage, and tell him to be here immediately: don’t come back without him ”; so Anne went, and within ten minutes was back with Shan.

At the summer-house door, then, stands Shan,

tall, a bandage, aslant beneath his deer-stalker cap, covering his right eye; and, "yes, mum," he said, wondering what now was up.

"Sit down, O'Shannon," said Mrs. Gordridge. "So you are going, are you?"

"Yes, mum, I've been dismissed."

"Where are you going to?"

"I'll be lodging with my uncle on the Chase a bit, mum."

"And then?"

"I'm throwing up kippuring, mum, for it isn't likely that any squire about here would take me now after all this row that's been, and as I don't mean to desert this neighbourhood, I must only turn my hand to some other work."

"You see, O'Shannon, all this trouble through setting up yourself in antagonism to your betters."

"Bettters, Mrs. Gordridge? Isn't that rather an old-fashioned sort of word? By the purpose of the Maker and Urger of this world, there aren't any betters any more, mum, I give you my word."

"So true: I forgot that. . . . You shouldn't be cheeky, O'Shannon! but I suppose you perceive that I am in your power now."

"How in my power, mum? I only wish you

were, I'd soon show you how fond I am of everything that owns the name of Gordridge"—of which saying Mrs. Gordridge, her eyes resting on his face, made a note in her mind.

"Well," she said, "but isn't all this business of leaving the estate merely a bit of bounce, since you must know that I want you now?"

"I didn't know that, mum, thank you; anyway, I couldn't stay, you know."

"And why not?"

"What, in the same place with that girl that has turned her back on me? getting glimpses of her? hearing her speak, may be. . . . One is not a stock, mum. Here I couldn't stay, nor wouldn't."

"Yet you just said that you meant to stay in the neighbourhood."

"Not by my choosing though: I'd be away like a long-dog to Canada to-morrow, never again to see England so long as oak and ash do grow, if there wasn't a young calf that I'd promised someone to keep half an eye on—"

"So you really meant to go away?"

"I did, Mrs. Gordridge, and do."

"Well, you are not to."

"Thank you very much, mum, I'm sure; you have always been the same to me somehow, marvellously kind and bounteous, and I wish

now I could stay, since you ask me to."

"You are to remain where you are, O'Shannon."

"But, mum, haven't I told you? It's hard enough to me to go from Glanncourt, and I wish to heaven it was only half possible—"

"Be quiet, O'Shannon: I have both my hands full of joy and happiness for you."

"For me, mum?"

"Yes, for you."

Shan, his eyes now cast upon the ground, chuckled a little grimly at this, and he said: "Why, Mrs. Gordridge, they say that there's no happiness save in the grave, since all this creation's a false show, where we take gudgeons when we fish for grilse."

"Let the creation alone," said the old lady, "the creation is a place with plenty of fun in it, at least for young people. O'Shannon, I am going to give you Rosie."

Silence. . . .

Shan, as the message of that gospel passed out of her mouth, had half started at her, as if to catch a ring falling, then had gradually sat again, while his jaws went quite white, and shook.

"You didn't look for quite so much luck, I see," said the old lady, her eyes on his face. . . .

“Well, men seem to be cheap machines to be agitated over the possession of a peach; it is only what was promised you, O’Shannon—”

“Rosie?” breathed Shan, leaning secretly toward her.

“Yes, Rosie, the Princess Royal.”

“But she won’t have me!”

“She will.”

“Have you asked her? Has er said er would?”

“Yes, that’s all quite settled.”

At this Shan laughed within himself, a rather mad laugh, and he said: “What, to have her at last down there between the brook and the pens?”

“Quite so—between the brook and the pens, or wherever else you please to have her.”

He thought it over, and eyeing the carpet askance, he remarked: “For five years I’ve been hearing her feet about the empty house, seen her asleep, may be, with her hair untidy when I came in from night-watching, or winking at me, or making a face at things with her nose sudden-like, as she does: it’s a lonely little hole, too, the cottage, when one’s alone.”

“Well, that’ll soon be remedied, as I mean you to be married Tuesday next three weeks.”

“That’s not long,” said Shan, eyeing a spot

on the carpet: "by then it can be all finished and done, and when she is once my wife, where's the man that could say no to it?"

"Just so: marriage is like lock-jaw, fixed and final."

"And the other one, now," said Shan, leaning still more keenly out to speak secretly: "*he*'ll be none the wiser."

"Precisely: that's why I am hurrying things on, since he may be quicker back than—"

"Why, he may never be back! Many as fine a fellow has licked the dust in battle before to-day!"

"Oh, come, you wouldn't wish him to be shot!"

"But suppose he is shot, he would never be the wiser, and suppose he isn't shot, when he comes home and finds me safely wived, what can he say? His arms will be tied! I'll laugh at him!"

"Be quiet, O'Shannon—But whatever is the matter with the man?"—for now Shan had covered his face, and the outburst of a sob convulsed his frame.

"Tell me—what is it?" asked Mrs. Gordridge, and when she got no answer, she added: "Better go home and get a nap, and then when

you are more presentable, come and have a talk with Rosie."

Now, however, Shan had sprung straight, and the vociferation of his "No!" made the old lady flinch, his face, of a rich red, shaking with passion as he stared at her.

"No what?" she asked: "you are not to startle me, O'Shannon."

"I say No," cried Shan anew.

"Well, say No as often as you feel disposed, but please don't startle me."

Shan stared at her, but now, his flare-up dying down, while the rich red bled out of his countenance, leaving it blanched, he now said meekly: "Forgive me, mum."

"So what is the big No about?" asked Mrs. Gordridge.

"I don't mean to marry Rosie Jones, mum, thank you," replied Shan, with a short-breath'd bosom.

"What?"

"No, mum."

"Oh, that's lunacy: you go and get some sleep."

"No, mum, that's the truth: I don't mean."

"Then, what in God's name am I to do with all these distraught people?" exclaimed Mrs.

Gordridge, spreading her palms, appealing to the ceiling; and Shan stood swinging his cap round and round on his forefinger.

“Come, O’Shannon,” said Mrs. Gordridge, “give one some sort of notion what gadfly has stung you now.”

“I say that I don’t mean to, Mrs. Gordridge: I don’t know that there is any reason which I could make quite clear to you.”

“But you know that Rosie Jones is almost like my daughter, that you will be a made man for life—I may mention that the dowry—”

“Oh, I know all that, Mrs. Gordridge, but the moor-game and grouse mate together without any dowry, nor I don’t think I was ever what could be called grasping—”

“No, no, I didn’t think that. . . . But what, then, has bitten you? Is it that Rosie is not for the moment furiously enamoured of you? I’ll admit that much, seeing that there has lately been a certain flirtation—but, come, I’ll let you into something:—she has only just confessed to me—just before you came, I declare it was—that she will soon come to like you, she said, after the marriage, because she admires your manly manners and independence of spirit, she said, your pretty way of using your pounders

upon those louts of police-officers, your larky way of knocking around with all the girls, she said, of which she has heard, and you are a husband that any girl would be glad of, she said. So you see, O'Shannon. The darling child's heart is, so to say, a fire waiting all laid for you; you have only to put a lucifer into it."

Shan stood with his surprised forehead lifted and alight at this enlivening tidings!

"Rosie said that, mum . . . ?"

"Rosie," replied the old lady with an inclination of the closed eyes.

"What, this forenoon you mean? Just before I came here er said it?" he asked, curious for details.

"Just before. She's all for you."

"Bless her heart!" he cried half-laugh.

"Quite so. So now, O'Shannon, that much is settled, and I want you now to see Mr. Orrock as to the banns—"

But now Shan groaned aloud.

"Well, what now, O'Shannon?" Mrs. Gordridge asked.

"I couldn't, Mrs. Gordridge!"

The old lady's mouth now went cross, making a sound of vexation at the man, saying: "O'Shan-

non, you try my patience . . . Won't you marry Rosie, really?"

"No, mum, really."

"What on earth, then, is one to do? This is so perfectly exasperating! Do you not realise the situation, my man? If you do not marry her, my son may, and surely you comprehend that I could not stomach such a misery: so for my sake, O'Shannon—don't show yourself selfish; did you not say just now that you had a great regard for the name of Gordridge? I shall know just how much to think of that profession, if you continue to refuse me this little thing"; upon which Shan, seeing that it was for a Gordridge that he refused, exclaimed: "Ah, Mrs. Gordridge, you make it hard for me."

Those heavy eyes of the House of Hanover now rested in judgment upon him some silent moments, and she asked: "Do you still, even after this personal appeal of mine on behalf of a family, after you yourself have averred that I have been benevolent to you, do you still say no?"

"Aye, still, mum. . . ."

"Go, go," said she, brushing him out with her hand, and as Shan went bowing, she drank out of her glass of egg-nog, beckoned to Anne

Hine out amid the flowers, and as Anne ran, said to her: "Take me back now. . . . This O'Shannon, for some reason or other, refuses to marry Rosie, so there seems to be nothing left: we shall be obliged to pack the poor child out to Kwang Chow. . . ."

"Quite so, Aunt," answered Anne, and turned to hand the stick, to hold her shoulder as a prop, while up with a sigh of Atlas rose the old strategist.

VI

SHAN ALL ENMESHED

THAT same night about nine Anne Hine was droning aloud to Mrs. Gordridge in Mrs. Gordridge's cosy-corner out of Mrs. Gordridge's pet book, Gibbon, when she was interrupted by the arrival of two telegrams, one of them a last word of good-bye of Arthur's, who, just embarked with his battalion, was away, the other being in two words only—"Yes, Sheila"—an answer this to the telegram sent out to Quang Chow from Glanncourt that forenoon: "Can you receive Rosie Jones for me?"

"So Arthur is off, poor fellow," sighed Mrs. Gordridge over an apple-wood fire; "if it hadn't been for this ignominy with Rosie, I shouldn't have let him go, such a rough time of the year, too . . . hear how the wind is howling round the house, and he out on the sea in it. How long before he'll be in South Africa, Anne?"

"Between fourteen and eighteen days, I think. . . ."

"Well, God go with Arthur. . . . They always say that the Gordridges are fortunate in their youth, and unfortunate after fifty: that's why

Julius Gordridge just contrived to snap me up by a fluke, but lost me through his death at fifty-three. . . . Anyhow, that's all right about dear Sheila and Rosie—that's all right. Have you found out about the P & O boats?"

"I have written to the Company, Aunt, and also to ask Lord Claude Goring to find out if anyone is going whom we could trust Rosie to. The through boats seem to leave the docks on alternate Thursdays, so since next Thursday will be too soon—"

"Why too soon?"

"Poor Rosie will be gone before she realises that she is going!"

"But isn't that the best way to do things that are grim and disagreeable? Always 'bite into the sharp apple,' as the Germans say, and have the whole misery over at the earliest moment. Tell me now how Rosie Jones takes it."

Anne Hine smiled. "As dying cows take Eternity," she answered, "seeing that Quang Chow is a world as vague to her as the further fringes of the grave. When she gathered what was about to befall her, she gaped at me, Aunt, and whispered, '*how do you spell it, Anne?*' I am sorry for poor Rosie, Aunt!"

"You are a most depressing young woman,"

mourned Mrs. Gordridge, almost groaning: "I wish you wouldn't."

"Wouldn't what, Aunt?"

"*You* know—play conscience to everybody, stick sly pins into people. I dare say you are blithe enough in your heart at the banishment of the poor child, but you pretend to be pierced with pain, in order to make me feel my cruelty—"

"Aunt, how *very*—!" went Anne, outraged.

"Oh, we are none of us such inscrutable Rahunas as we fancy, so don't suppose yourself unknown. . . . But what else did the poor child say?"

"I—hardly like to tell, Aunt, lest I should happen to 'play conscience' to anyone: I had better say that she danced at the mere thought of leaving all her old life here, and diving into something cold and unknown at the other end of existence, and I'd better not tell how the poor girl gaped, and staggered, and gave way, how her poor face—"

Mrs. Gordridge groaned, even as with sudden peevishness she said: "All this through the fatuity of that O'Shannon! Can you not divine any motive why the man has acted in this mad fashion?"

“ I don’t know, but I have a notion, Aunt, that there may be a treaty between O’Shannon and Arthur that Arthur is to marry her.”

“ Now, how far-fetched! Why, the two fellows are sworn foes! ”

“ You are *always* right, Aunt,” sighed Anne Hine faintly at the fire, over which she pored from the hearth-rug by the side of Mrs. Gordridge’s great chair.

“ But is it not actually so?” asked Mrs. Gordridge: “ did they not do battle for her like two savages? and O’Shannon came off the winner; so why has the wight acted in this wild way?”

“ People’s hearts are more or less subtle machines, Aunt,” remarked Anne, “ and frequently ‘ sworn foes ’ are even more in love each with each than most sworn friends are in enmity.”

“ Facts are facts,” said Mrs. Gordridge, “ and the fact is that O’Shannon and Arthur are at war. Why, O’Shannon almost as good as said to me to-day that he wished Arthur might get shot.”

“ I dare say he does,” said Anne—“ with one half of his heart, but, if it were to happen, probably the other half would break—”

“ More pretty rainbows and mirages—”

“No, O’Shannon, I am sure, cherishes some sort of passion for Arthur, implanted into his nature from their youth, and last evening when Arthur released him from the police, O’Shannon was furiously moved by it, flew off on a bicycle somewhere—I think to the station to catch Arthur, and it is quite possible that they came then to some sort of an understanding which may explain O’Shannon’s sudden passion for bachelorhood. It is beautifully noble of the fellow, if it be so, for his enthusiasm for Rosie more resembles a lunacy—”

“Mirages,” said Mrs. Gordridge: “game-keepers are not great heroes and self-immolators, so the man is either mad, or has some motive that I know nothing of.”

“You are *certain* to be right, Aunt,” murmured Anne.

“Well, go on with the big trouble,” and Anne, taking up Gibbon from the rug, read of the Romans to the chorus of the gale, till now the brain of the old lady gave way to the droning, her brow dropping slumbrously, upon which Anne drowsed over her sketch-book leaves, her head leaning to the left for her palm to stroke down and down the left half of her dark hair, till late in the sounding night she retired last of

the household; but, always the first to behold the daylight, very early the following morning she was at her delight, painting in The Meadows, when a man named Price, happening to pass close by her, rifle on shoulder, drawing after him a rabble of terriers, she becked and called him: "Price! So the head-keeper has left, has he?"

"Aye, handed over the keys to Mr. Cochrane last evening, miss."

"So where is he at present?"

"Him did say as er was moving to his uncle above the Chase, miss, and his sticks he has put under the shanty in Sharp the blacksmith's back-yard."

Anne drew her mink cloak closer round her shoulders, sketching with rather stiff fingers, it being still cold, the morning's glow yet young, and the early birds, the cows, the ground, all rich with jewels of dew.

"I dare say you will be seeing him?" she said.

"Aye sure, miss. . . . Is there any message?"

"No, I only wished—By the way, have you all been told that Mrs. Gordridge is going away?"

"Well, now! I hadn't heard that. For long, miss?"

"A few days, no doubt: only to take Miss

Jones to London, who is taking a trip to—Persia.”

“Well, now!” went Price, “I hadn’t heard that,” and Anne Hine thought to herself: “he will inform O’Shannon, and O’Shannon, seeing that she is about to be lost both to Arthur and to himself, may now be tempted into having her. I wonder? He appears to be a gallant piece of spirit, and that should be grand to watch the moral tug and struggle. . . . I hope he’ll yield now to the flesh and the devil, for it is the only sure scheme for keeping our small Arthur from Rosie, and then for my own repose, for if he’s great enough still to decline her, really this gamekeeper may become girt in colours all too beguiling to the organs of a girl’s fancy.”

And in truth, just as Anne had foreseen, it was only four days later than Shan was hearing the news, not indeed from Price himself, but from a hawker to whom it had already spread through Price, for among those people, supposed to be the most “news-hunting” in England, rumour scoots wide-legged, like a goose pursued by a wolf. The hawker stood with his barrow on the road, and when Shan, who was sawing larch-wood by a well-side in a bower down below, had said that he needed neither bloater nor haddock

that day, the hawker remarked: "May be you do know already that the folk at Glanncourt be going off."

Shan stopped his humming and sawing a moment to say no, he didn't know, and hummed and sawed anew, whereat the chapman, touching his herrings and things into a witchinger arrangement, remarked: "Aye, they be going, Mrs. Gordridge, Miss Hine, and Miss Jones, all the three."

"Hardly very probable at this time o' year," replied Shan: "but, then, you St. Briavel's bugs, you always know a great deal more than your prayers."

"Well, I do have it from—"

"Aye, you do have it from Mrs. Gordridge's self, I dare say. . . . Where do they say they are going to?"

"Miss Jones, they do have it to say, be bound for Persia."

"It's a wonder, now, they didn't say Japan! for that goes on further still down under the world."

"Well, I only give you what I have got myself."

"Gossiping, news-hunting lot," pshawed Shan, and sawed away, in a moment thinking no more of the thing.

But later in the day, as a seed that, once sown, secretly grows, the fish-man's words again occurred to Shan, and more and more frequently kept recurring during the next three days, but merely as a curiosity of thought for the brain to amuse itself with, without any doubt at all in him as to the unfoundedness of the rumour; during which days, his uncle's cottage where he was staying being in a most lonely place, nothing more of the story had reached his ears, and it was only on the fourth evening about six o'clock, when he sat cleaning a fowling-piece beneath a beech-tree's shade, that something seemed to breathe into some deepest region of his brain: "but if it is true?" for now the seed, secretly growing, had peeped above ground, and within two seconds after the feeling "it *may* be true" was born in him, all his consciousness was rent with the shriek: "it *is* true!"

Up at once he sprang, a pallid lad, and at once he ran—toward Glanncourt, with what purpose he could have given no account, only he did not doubt that, if she was really being banished to foreign parts, it was in order to bury her for ever from Arthur, and he had given his promise to Arthur to guard her for him. Well so far had he guarded her for Arthur, his heart knew it,

singing a new song and marching-tune within him, so that, sawing his larch-woods during these days, he had hummed to himself for all the lark-music that yarned in his bosom, merry in his bereavement. But how now to guard her in England—but by marrying her? And since she was now to be lost to himself and to the other, too—what then? why not? And that sly fiend of self which is in each one leered inside his chest, tongue in cheek, echoing: “what then?” . . . “why not?”

It was an ill wind that blew no one any good. . . .

But Rosie might be already away, he was wholly in the dark, might not get to Glanncourt in time: and he ran rabidly, his hound, Snout, half mastiff, half bull-dog, bounding joyously about his toil like a flourish coiled about a sign-manual, and always his heart was raised in a sort of prayer for good lungs and the grace of running, even as it kept repeating in a mechanical kind of way within him its “what then?” and its “why not . . .?”

But now, as night deepened down, over the lonely road there dashed upon him a calèche whose dobbin was being furiously lashed by its driver, and Shan, casting a glance round as it

galloped near upon him, panted aloud, now hard breathing: "Dr. Blood! Stop! I want you to—!"

He got no farther, for the physician with a face as gorgeous as his name, lashing at his nag, shouted out at him: "Out of the road! am late to say good-bye to Mrs. Gordridge—!" and was gone away.

"Now may God help a chap," whispered Shan inwardly, knowing now that she must be going by "the seven-forty-five," and there were five miles still to run, a distance hardly great to him ordinarily, but the bigness of his present winded him: and with all his entrails raised in a sort of prayer he raced.

VII

SHAN BOTH HOT AND COLD

IT was night when he hied up the tump of the Morplepiece, halted there half-a-minute breathless, and now in straight career to the Hall hied down across the brook, and up the steep on the other side; but at the swing-gate which leads to the path between the north cover and shrubbery he came upon the puny Chuckabutty musing over the gate in his fez-cap, smoking a cheroot to the moon, to whom Shan gasped: "Mrs. Gordridge at home?"

"She's gone away," said the Hindoo *chef*.

"How long?"

"Chuckabutty now began to chuckle, saying:

"Why, you are in a sweat—!"

"How long?" cried Shan.

"Hardly just gone, I think, since—"

Shan span and ran, away past the home-farm, casting vain glances to see the stable-clock through the foliage, down away southward through a small gate into the turnpike road, no time to be out of breath now, only a pair of legs that prayed and rained their steps. Through the village he hied, and when it was well behind him,

and still he could see no sign of any carriage, hope perished in him, but on climbing the height of the next hill he could spy in the moonshine on a farther hillside a carriage which one horse was hauling at a walk up the steep with petty precipitate steps: and he was quickly trotting with it.

He could not answer when Anne bobbed forth her head to ask what was the matter, but after some minutes, when he was understood to say that he wished to talk with Mrs. Gordridge, the carriage now stood still, and Mrs. Gordridge looked out.

“I could hardly talk to you here,” he said at her ear—for there sat Rosie and a lady’s-maid within the brougham: so now Mrs. Gordridge groaned and got herself down to him on the road, saying: “Be quick, O’Shannon, or I shall miss my train.”

“Between us, mum,” panted Shan secretly, “is that correct about Rosie Jones being off to a foreign land?”

“Well, what then?”

“But, mum, that was only my fun about not wanting to marry Rosie.”

“*Fun!*”

“That was all, mum!”

“ So are you willing to marry her now?”

“ Rather, mum. Everybody about knows very well—”

“ But who is it that is mad, the man or I? for it must be one or the other. Fun?”

“ That was all, mum! I declare, it’s enough to make one laugh!”

“ What is enough to make one laugh?”

“ The whole thing, mum!”

“ Which whole thing? O’Shannon, I hope you are quite compos mentis. Do you mean that you were not serious that forenoon when you refused Rosie, when you shouted out ‘No!’ and shocked me?”

“ What, Rosie, mum? my little cousin who was always a heart’s idol to me?”

Mrs. Gordridge gave vent to a laugh, very relieved and pleased at heart, though, shy of appearing so, she said: “ I’m sure some fly has stung the fellow! So, then, it was ‘*fun*’? and since this *fun* has cost me £75 for booking a ticket, no doubt you’ll be prepared to pay it me back, supposing I agree now to give Rosie to you?”

“ Anything you choose, mum,” said Shan.

“ But what has been your object—? for it can’t well be a fact that you were actuated by some consideration for Mr. Arthur—”

“ Oh, mum, don't bring in your son, for Heaven's sake: I have nothing to do with your son, mum.”

“ At any rate, O'Shannon, you do undertake positively at present, if I should prove so weak as to yield to your entreaty?”

“ You may be certain, mum.”

“ Well, certainly, you do not deserve it, but I'll see what can be done for you,” and she fluttered back elated to the carriage, which, presently turning back toward the village, left Shan there, his handkerchief at his face.

He did not return to his uncle's, but took a bed in Albington, where, at the Bunch of Grapes, he gathered a crowd round him that night, and, loud with devilry, astonished everyone by his lavish treating, making the cash fly, himself deeply drinking, though known as “ an abstainer ”; so that one winked at another: “ Him be gone a bit mad at quitting Glann-court—that's it.”

A late riser the next day, Shan walked up the half-mile of shady road to Glanncourt with the gladsomeness of his health, of the sunshiny morning, of his approaching marriage, showing in his jauntiness of step, though it was strange, too, with what fury he slashed with the switch

in his hand at hemlock or honeysuckle flowering in the hedges, and curious how he cut his poor Snout when the hound darted after a motor-car that posted past; and meeting near The Meadows gate a loose-bosomed woman way-faring with a freight of vegetables, to her he sang cheerily out, "Hello, Mother Higgins, how goes it this morning?"

"Lar, Shan," she answered with a certain Welt-schmerz, or world-smart, "I gat a bile an me tit this marning, and Bella her's gat one an hers; but here! a word wi' thee—Pruie just asked me if I did know where thee's to be found, for Mrs. Gordridge, er said, has sent out a boy in buttons asking everywhere after thee," upon which Shan quickened his steps till he got before the low front of Glanncourt, and before long was being led to a room, when out of it stepped Rosie, her eyes on the ground, till suddenly sighting Shan, she stood whitish, Shan, too, standing as whitish on a sudden as she.

"Morning," he could hardly be heard to say, and the girl's lips barely stirred, and her regard struck him dead with disdain; and all at once that ghost of Rosie made a dart past him, like one escaping blindly, and was away.

Shan was now brought before Mrs. Gord-

ridge, but so confounded by his encounter with the ghost outside, that for some time he could lend no attention to what she said to him. There with easel and palette at the window opposite the great cedar on the lawn sat Anne Hine, smiling her fine smile at mankind, while Mrs. Gordridge, cowering by the fire, informed Shan of all that had now to be brought about by him and her.

“To-morrow at three,” she said, “I shall have Mr. Spender here, and you can come and see what I propose as to a settlement, but as to seeing Rosie herself, you mustn’t yet, for with all this chopping and changing between O’Shannon and China, the poor child is now naturally half out of her wits; but if you come—what’s to-day? Thursday, the twentieth—come on Saturday to see and may be take her for a walk; only you shouldn’t start pawing the child about yet, O’Shannon, that is, if you are not desirous of having your eyes scratched out.”

“Why, mum, don’t you suppose I know how to keep my hands in their place?” Shan wished to know; “anyhow, till she becomes a bit fonder of me, as she quickly will, for she’s said it herself.”

“Rosie has? I am very pleased! To whom did she say that?”

“Why, to you, mum, didn’t she?”

“To *me*?”

“Didn’t you tell me so in the summer-house, mum, how she asserted that she admires my—?”

“Why, so true, I forgot that . . . quite so. Only, don’t be too crude and brutal with her, woo her by inches, she will soon—By the way, what about your ‘goods’?”

“My sticks I’ve left down at Sharpe’s, the blacksmith’s, mum, for the time.”

“Well, you had better part with the lot, inasmuch as all that bachelor stuff is no use for a young wife, and I will undertake to have the cottage furnished throughout by one of the London firms.”

“Truth to tell, mum, I’d sooner furnish it myself,” observed Shan, eyeing the floor.

“But how much money have you on the whole?”

“Over two hundred pounds, Mrs Gordridge.”

“But what good is that? You are not to be independent, O’Shannon, and you are to remember that Rosie is a well-nurtured girl, grown used to elegance. If you are so eager to spend your £200, you had better pay me back the £75 of passage-money which I have spent through your ‘*fun*’—”

“I’ll pay it back this day, mum.”

“You are not to be independent, O’Shannon, I say! What you ought to do is to creep on your two knees to worship me and President Kruger, and not be independent.”

“I worshipped you years before, mum, so to speak,” answered Shan, a smile in the eyes: “I don’t know so much about this Kruger.”

“Kruger, too: for suppose Mr. Arthur had not gone to the war—”

“Oh, do, do, Mrs. Gordridge, don’t bring in your son!” cried Shan with sudden fretfulness now, “that’s a man that I want to have nothing to say about.”

“If you like me, O’Shannon, you must like my son!”

Shan groaned.

“Is that all you have got to say to me, Mrs. Gordridge?” he asked.

“I think so. Be sure to see Mr. Orrock at once. . . . And, O’Shannon, I am to depend this time upon your running straight? There is to be no more mysterious ‘*fun*’. . .? I declare there’s something in me now that doesn’t feel quite easy about the man since his queer conduct, as if I were building houses on quick-sands! And yet I always thought that no one was so reliable. . . .!”

“Why, what do you think of me, mum?” asked Shan, rising; “I intend to marry Rosie, and when I once have her, no doubt I shall know how to hold her.”

“Oh, you go away,” pshawed Mrs. Gordridge to the grate, little guessing at his troubled mind, while Anne Hine, who much better divined, smiled over her brush.

But this feeling of uneasiness in the old lady was not baseless, for that ship of fate that was freighted with Rosie's and Shan's marriage was to have no roseate trip. For one fact, it became known that Rosie was very indisposed, and then it almost looked as if Shan himself by his own behaviour was trying all he could to make the marriage impossible. On the very day of the settlement, old Pruie, getting into talk with Anne in a walk of the New Garden, in the gloaming, in telling her how Shan had brought up a bed and some things, and was now in the cottage “just like in the old time,” added, “but oh, him be queer, miss, er bent like the old lad at all.”

“In what way?” asked Anne.

“Him be queer, miss—it be hard to tell—but after being in the cover all night wi' the dogs, er hasn't slept a wink, only sits wi's legs afore him,

and they do have it to say er made every one of the fellows in the place tight the night before last wi's money, nor some of them haven't been right since."

"That seems naughty," said Anne.

"Oh, they are a loutish lost lot down in that village, miss, believe me, for as I always do say to myself, it bent the drink that's bad, it's the people; people do blame the drink, and think it's the drink that's bad, but that's all a mistake, because er bent the drink that's bad, it's them as do *take* the drink."

"You are too subtle, Pruie," remarked Anne; "but it is to be hoped that your master himself wasn't—"

"Oh, him never was tight in his life, I don't suppose, though they do have it to say er weren't fur off it. Aye, him be queer someways—between us him be just terrible bitter against Mr. Gordridge, him will say to me, or to himself rather, as er did this morning, 'what have I got to thank'n for?' er said, sitting on the step: 'if him rescued me from the police,' er said, 'it was only keeping of his promise, as any man 'ood have done, and I do owe nothing to he'—"

"All that means very little," said Anne, "for O'Shannon does not really dislike Lieutenant

Gordridge, but he probably feels that he is breaking some promise, and yielding to a temptation, so he is bitter against Lieutenant Gordridge, for people are always bitter against those whom they feel that they are wronging, Pruie."

"You wouldn't say," went Pruie. "But that was only this morning him was like that, miss, this afternoon er be as spry as you like, er be off to St. Arvens to try on a new coat, having to see Miss Rosie to-morrow in the Hall"—in which new coat Anne was sufficiently interested to watch from a window the following gloaming till Shan turned up with a Homburg hat and glorious cravat, to be led into a book-room where Rosie, new-risen from bed that afternoon, volumed in a shawl of Spanish lace, waited for him.

Shan, for his share, followed the flunkey who led him with the reluctance of one being taken to the stake, and when he was announced, and the door closed behind him, and he found himself alone with Rosie in a room in which the growing gloom was beshone only by a glow from the grate, his tongue was tied, Rosie, too, remaining dumb, ghostly vague in her lace, a Whistler vision, standing with her hand on a chair; and during some moments those two,

whom the cynic Mr. Orrock was soon to unite for life, stood as stupefying as lions let loose one upon the other.

"I was sorry to hear that you have been bad," Shan managed to stammer at last.

"It is all right," she said.

"I have brought you these," he next said, putting a bunch of George Bruants roses on a pedestal.

"You are very obliging," replied Rosie.

"Four of them are from the garden, and the rest James Downie gave me," observed Shan, but it was a blunder to expound the origin of the roses, Rosie returned no answer, and now he stood struck.

"You may take a seat, if that pleases you," she said presently.

And at once he felt that she was "sticking-on side," meant to show him the fine lady, and this, increasing his feeling of inferiority, completed Shan's sheepishness. He sat on the very edge of an arm-chair over against where she stood gray and tall-looking in that gloaming, and all that he could discover to say was: "Well, Rosie, here we are."

She made no answer.

"Won't you talk to me?" he asked.

“I am prepared to reply to any observation which you may be pleased to make,” she answered.

“It is like this, look,” said he: “you were going to be shipped away like a clutch of eggs, and when I gathered that it must be either that or going to the altar with you, I came forward and offered to take you.”

“Ah! I am the victim of a philanthropy . . .”

“The victim—ha, ha!—yes, that’s your way of putting it; ‘the victim of a philanthropy’—yes, very well put. But you will be just to me, Rosie, I hope: no doubt you have been told that a fortnight ago almost, just after the war broke out, I was given the chance of marrying you, and what did I say to it? I said no. Couldn’t quite tell you just by what muscle I managed it, but done it was. Aye, I did it that day: I said no.”

“Why did you, when you knew that Mrs. Gordridge would be giving more or less money with me?”

“That’s of no importance why, but I did it—in spite of the more or less money that Mrs. Gordridge would be giving with you, Rosie. So you see that it isn’t that I’m grasping after you, for I said no, and it was only when you were being shipped off—”

"That was no business of yours, if I was being shipped off."

"But which would you rather, be shipped off to Providence knows what far port of the sea, or be married to me?"

"Frankly, I think I'd rather be shipped off, since you ask me," replied Rosie to that rash query: "but, of course, I am quite in Mrs. Gordridge's hands, and into whatever sty my guardian likes to cast me, I have to submit to be cast."

"Why, Rosie," cried Shan, "can a girl be more cruel to a man who worships her than a terrier to a rat?"

"I do not intend to be cruel, but I don't mind if I am," Rosie confessed.

"But, Rosie," said Shan through a choky throat in a hoarse tone, "you don't know, I am not a happy man, have some pity on me."

"No one has any pity on *me*."

"Well *I* have pity on you, since you say that you need pity," murmured Shan yearningly.

"You are very obliging, but to be frank, your pity and all your other feelings are matters of complete indifference to me."

"But is that quite right, now? We are about to be husband and wife—"

“ We shall be finely matched.”

“ No, never that, since I am never half fit to fall and kiss your little finger, but if you don’t egg on yourself against me, you’ll soon be caring more for me, I trust, as you’ve admitted yourself—”

“ *I* admitted?”

“ Yes, dear, to your Mama—don’t say that it is not true, even if it isn’t—not as a mate, may be, you won’t be caring for me, but as your poor spaniel you will, for you know, Rosie, I never considered you as quite the same flesh and blood as myself or anybody, but as an angel to be worshipped, as a white image in a shrine, and these five years I have only dreamed of marrying you, dear, so as to show you how a man can be a hound at your sweet feet, dear, with a humble heart before God, to kiss the hem of your garment, as when the people kissed the hem of the Lord’s robe, and that healed them of all their broken hearts, Rosie ”; now Shan’s utterance choked, but he came bowed down, and laid his mouth on the hem of Rosie’s robe.

“ This is nonsense,” murmured Rosie with an averted face in a tone of patient boredom which was mainly real, but more or less stagey, too: “ if you know what is to your advantage, you will inflict upon me such exhibitions as seldom as

possible, since they only bore me," upon which Shan sprang straight, answering: "No, I mean to inflict them upon you as frequently as my soul speaks, Rosie, till you commence to understand, and to answer to it."

"That will be never, then, so don't flatter yourself, you will only be the more disillusioned," she said.

"But I don't despair, not a bit! you wait, you don't know yet what's coming for you, you see," now cried Shan, who, standing now close to her, though he could barely see her face in that arrased room, was inhaling fugitive fumes of perfume from her being, "you can't even conceive yet! I shall be having you so warm in my arms—you don't know Shan O'Shannon, I am as wild inside as ninety-nine climbing mow-fires!—I shall be leading you such a dance of love, that even if you be a snow-flake, I shall be making you flush."

"Indeed?" breathed Rosie, eyeing the floor, and she added in a low tone: "you will only be doing bad for yourself. . . ."

"So you say at present," replied Shan: "but you wait for three or four months of me, and by then you will be able truly to sign yourself 'Mrs. O'Shannon,' with a flourish to it."

“ But just now I was an image in a shrine, now it is another tune, I am to be wildly whirled in some kind of climbing fires: I don’t think that you quite know your own mind.”

“ Who could, do you think, when he is by you?” he asked: “ but don’t folks kiss the idols that they adore? The Creator did not knead up that piece of flesh all out of cream and peach-pulp, Rosie, only to be knelt down before, but to be kissed, too. Why, bless me, I’ve seen old men of eighty, and old women, too, Rosie, stop on the road to gape after you with greed, and to mumble to themselves what a bliss you are; for myself, I believe if I was a stock or a stone, I’d stir when you stepped close to me, yes, I fancy I’d scent your step, and stir: and now it is my fate to have you—down there by ourselves in the old house—I don’t believe it one bit, for it sounds beerified enough, but it is true, I am to own you, it has happened so, and where’s the man who dares say no to it? So I intend to grasp and use what the good God in His goodness grants me, you see, and to fuse you like wax in a wildish fire’s furnace, as well as worship you, and I want you to let me put on this ring—”

Rosie drew back. “ Ring? No, I have only undertaken to wear one ring of yours.”

"Oh, you have to," and having now her hand, he drew her to put on the ring, but, on a sudden, forgetting the ring, had her bound to his bosom, devouring her mouth, nor did Rosie struggle in the least, giving herself as a rag to that greed which had whiffed her off her feet, though the moment that he released her she stamped at him, and they remained some feet apart in the dark, dumbly hearing each other's laboured breathing.

"Don't be cross," said Shan meekly, "though you should be, for I promised your Mama not to . . . Not the only promise in my life that I have broken, may be. Anyhow, it's done, I've kissed a girl, and that girl's Rosie"—Shan spoke now in a kind of reverie, with the naïveté of a child—"I kissed Frances Price and Julia Howley one Sunday afternoon under the hedge of Perkin's Clause a few weeks after I was thirteen, and they were my last kisses—till now this one."

"I am not interested," said Rosie; "though they say—"

"Well, what?"

"That you have not the reputation of being quite such a St. Anthony as you say—so I have been told . . . not, of course, that I care a fig. . ."

"Who is this St. Anthony?"

"A person who disapproved of girls, they say."

"Why, can't one know how to knock around with the young women for a lark without going any farther? I have spun them all round the waist—"

"I am not interested, really."

"Well, may I put on the ring now?"

"I'd prefer that than to be subjected afresh to what you just did to me."

"You'll soon be liking it better."

"Shall I?"

"So hold out your hand. . . ."

Rosie now leant aside and switched on the light, and now those eyes of Shan, that mostly had a ray of merriment in them, saw her in her shawl, with a Rubens rose that rode on the movement of her bosom, as she held her already glittering finger for his ring with a little disgust hung on her lower lip; sudden Shan dropped before this revelation of a fair lady that was to be his, and, having pressed on the ring, once more put his lips to her robe.

"There, that's done," he said, rising, "and I am grateful to you, Rosie, from my heart; Mrs. Gordridge suggested that you might go for a stroll, I don't know—"

"As you see, I am not well."

"I see that. Well, I won't keep you. May I come again on Monday?"

"Not Monday."

"When?"

"There is no need—You will soon be having a very great deal of me, it seems. . . . You will be told when."

"Well, I must live on that; good-bye, and don't be downhearted, now: I'd be killing myself for you, if that would save you any heart-ache, but killing myself would only mean foreign parts for you. Dear, good-bye." He pressed her hand tight, and went; and Rosie, after putting out the light, sat over the grate in the dark, gazing into the fire.

Yet a new experience awaited her the next morning when, after pacing down the half-mile to the village with Anne, preceded by a little crowd of eight maid-servants, she sat in the church: for, immediately after reading out that Nicene Creed in which he little believed, Mr. Orrock was all of a sudden calling out her name, publishing her banns. There in the family-pew Anne Hine sat smiling, but Rosie's face flew into crimson, and then was white, this having come like a bolt upon her: for Mrs. Gordridge, always

a grim, if a wise, surgeon, desiring to accustom her mind in all ways to the idea of the marriage, had urged her to be at church that day, but had uttered no word as to any banns. At this news there was "movement" enough throughout St. Jude's that forenoon, half of the throng of eyes turning toward Rosie's distress, and half toward Shan, who, ever a regular church-goer, heard it with a low head in his seat near the door.

But the effect upon Shan of this hearing of his banns, of feeling himself as it were half-married already, was anything but happy, for that same night the lad broke out in an extraordinary fashion, making such a scandal as was never known, and it was with pallid flesh and shaky hands that his housekeeper, meagre old Pruie, sought out her friend, Anne, on the Monday evening, to ask her if she thought that it would all be getting to Mrs. Gordridge's ears.

"Mrs. Gordridge already knows something," breathed Anne Hine close over her sketch-book, sketching beneath a calm arch of sky in which one only star psalmed a solo before the chorus-roar, "she can hardly help knowing. . . . But what exactly happened?"

"Him got real tight, miss," answered Pruie secretly, "and everybody else in the village

wi'n seemingly—Sunday night, too, why, shame ought to have covered their face, and him that all the world do regard as such a tidy,* God-fearing young fellow, what a pity it be. Him was more like a wild lion than a man, miss, they do say er had the strength of ten, for after making them all tight, er turned on them wi's fists, and er was a free fight, till they all runned away frightened from him, and four of them be in their beds to-day wi' broken bones and noses. Then when nobody was left to fight wi', him turned round and fair wrecked the bar of The Grapes, and er caught up Griffiths' nag in his arms, which they do say three men couldn't lift, miss, and er runned burdened wi'n down the street, and er hurled'n down the well—”

“How splendid!” breathed Anne Hine.

“That's cider, you see, that's what the cider do do. . . . But O, miss, if you had seen his eyes when er got home! I was there waiting up, wondering where he'd got to, and the minute him come, and his eyes fell on me, er laughed aloud, and er sang out, ‘well, you old messer! look out for yourself!’—and, miss, er makes one dart after me! If it wasn't for the table, he'd have had me sure, but I skipped round like a

* Respectable.

sparrow and skipped upstairs, and by the time er come up, I was under the bed; him searched and him searched for me, muttering to himself, oh, er searched earnest, miss, and my heart was in my throat the same as if er was a ghost searching for me, but er searched every crack except just under the bed—it was only God’s mercy. Then him went down again, and I listened to him breaking up of everything, the table, the crockery—nothing be left whole in the place.”

“Which only shows that the man’s gallant skull is virgin to alcohol,” murmured Anne; “but how has he got on to-day?”

“To-day him hasn’t uttered one word to me, miss, nor er wouldn’t touch his breakfast, but er sat under that beech-tree aboove the brook for hours wi’s brow down on his knees, feeling seedy no doubt. I did keep an eye on him from the cottage, and what do you suppose I see’n do? Him do always keep in his brown jacket the photograph of a boy in an Eton jacket, miss, which I do delieve to be Lieutenant Gordridge’s photograph, so him takes this out of his breast-pocket, and er looks at it a bit, then er chucks it from him toward the brook; but it wouldn’t go into the brook for him, er went all sky-larking

edgeways through the air, so him sprang up and caught'n, all red in the face er was, and rent'n to bits, and tossed the bits into the brook; then er crouched down again under the beech wi's brow on his knees for hours."

"Well, this looks troublous for the wedding," remarked Anne, putting up her sketch-book; and walking to the Hall, she asked herself: "Shall I be quite sorry if the wedding does not come off? Isn't this old Shan-lad as much too good in his way for my Rosie as Arthur Gordridge is in his? And it can hardly come off, if he is to continue in this frantic mood of remorse"—for she was aware that Mrs. Gordridge had declared that if Shan only once more broke loose in this fashion, she would refuse to let him be Rosie's husband. But this mood of Shan's was soon enough to reel into wholly another mood, one even more dangerous to that cranky ship of fate that carried his marriage: for near eleven of the Wednesday morning following that stormy Sunday night, Shan being then again seated beneath his beech-tree, a telegram was handed him whose influence upon his mind was to prove no less than mighty. It came from the Cape, and thus ran: "Arrived safe. Inform my mother. Thanks. Arthur."

Quick was its effect: for the moment Shan had read it, he raised himself, and went with roaming feet here and there over the bit of broken ground on which he stood, like some vague wight who seeks some object on the ground, but forgets quite what, and he rubbed the telegram over his cheeks and over his mouth with a sound of bubbling and of sobbing, and a sort of daft laugh of a mother.

Later in the day he got himself piloted to Mrs. Gordridge's presence, to inform her that Mr. Arthur had safely arrived, for he had got a telegram; and when Mrs. Gordridge in a state of amazement exclaimed: "But this is grotesque that Arthur should have telegraphed to someone else than me!" Shan stood and laughed at her.

During the ensuing four days, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday, on which last day his banns were again published, Shan O'Shannon hardly ate, hardly slumbered, hardly did any work, shirked a meeting with his sweetheart: what was going on in the game-keeper's nut no one knew, no one could guess; and on the Monday he disappeared.

VIII

SHAN VANISHED

“WHERE, then, is the man gone to?” asked Mrs. Gordridge on the Tuesday evening, seated on a heap of quilts in the head-keeper’s cottage: “he has no earthly right to take himself off the estate in this way: I declare this man is becoming the greatest anxiety of my life!”

“I conjecture,” said Mr. Orrock, “that he is only gone to Gloucester or somewhere, to see may be after his wedding garments, because—” but he was interrupted by a louder row of the hammering, rasping, sawing, steaming, which was being made upstairs by the London furnishers still at their work in the last of the twilight.

“But why should he slink off in this singular fashion to get clothes?” Mrs. Gordridge wished to know.

“Why should he do any of the odd things which he has lately done?” asked Dr. Blood, sitting on a dado all among shavings: “I’m afraid that here is a case in which Socialism and Free-thought have brought about a state of the spiritual part of the man—”

“A state of the digestion, may be,” said Mr. Orrock: “O’Shannon is not a free-thinker, nor have I any closer listener to my sermons, or rather my lectures—”

“That may account for the poor man’s going wrong,” grumbled Dr. Blood.

Now, this grumble Mr. Orrock, pacing about, could scarcely hear in that row, but he guessed what had been said, and answered: “Precisely what I said last week when I heard of Perkins’ little girl’s decease: I said: ‘I need hardly ask if Dr. Blood attended her.’”

“Never even saw the child,” said Dr. Blood; “I was on my way to her when she died.”

“Ah, you see. . . . The poor little girl clung on to life for days, but on learning that the doctor was coming, gave way to despair, and sighed her last.”

“How trying!” now pouted Mrs. Gordridge: “can’t you two ever be conscious of the presence of third persons when you get together? You are so preoccupied with each other, like piston and cylinder, that you are absent to all else beneath the sun, till it becomes really unmannerly! I was asking, Richard, why you should suppose that O’Shannon would go off to get clothes—”

“ Oh, Aunt,” remarked Anne Hine, now turning inward from regarding the sunset’s death-drama, “ do you suppose that O’Shannon has gone to get any clothes? I doubt if any of us will see Shan O’Shannon again. . . . ”

“ Now for the augur of evil,” groaned Mrs. Gordridge.

“ It seems to me so clear now,” said Anne, “ that O’Shannon must have promised not to marry Rosie: what else can be the meaning of that word ‘ *Thanks* ’ in Arthur’s cable to him from the Cape? or why else should Arthur wire his arrival to O’Shannon at all, sign the wire ‘ *Arthur*, ’ and be so wise as to send it almost a full day before sending one to Aunt herself? For O’Shannon received his at eleven in the morning, and Aunt did not receive one until seven in the evening. The whole business was deliberately contrived by Arthur in order to tickle and please O’Shannon to the man’s simple heart, to drench him in flattery with the ‘ *inform my mother*, ’ and so to keep him to his word: and I believe that O’Shannon means to keep his word.”

“ Oh, don’t be sibylline,” said the old lady: “ if there was any such understanding, would O’Shannon ever for one thing have let the banns be published? would he ever—”

“ Oh, but O’Shannon quite broke down when Rosie was going out to China,” replied Anne; “ he must have said to himself, ‘ she’s going to be lost to us both, so I’ll have her,’ and he did evidently mean to have her, for those outrageous bouts of his were only due to a muggy state of his conscience, to his secret feeling that he was breaking his vow, however good the excuse; but when Arthur’s artful cable came, the fellow fell fervently in love with him anew, and resolving once more to keep his vow, he once more renounced Rosie, and ran away: that’s my reading of him, and I doubt if we shall see him again.”

“ But it was not until days after getting the cablegram from Arthur that he went away,” remarked Mr. Orrock: “ it would hardly be the cablegram that caused him to go.”

“ Only five days:—it took him that time to make up his mind,” said Anne.

“ You make the man out to be mad,” now said the old lady coldly, “ for he must be aware that if he is not here on the wedding-day, Rosie will at once be banished from someone’s reach, just as she was being banished when he intervened to stop her from going before: so, if he has run away, his motive can’t well be Arthur’s

good, and it is quixotic to think of such a thing, inasmuch as Glanncourt is not Laputa, nor is the world a town of gold up in the clouds, and game-kippurs do not act out of the normal for their master's good. There is undoubtedly some sort of amity now existing between Arthur and O'Shannon, as that cable seems to show, but—what is it all about? Oh, it is not fair of Arthur to puzzle me! But O'Shannon will be back tomorrow, I know, for the man is keen to marry Rosie, and therefore *will* marry her, and must; only I wish he wouldn't cause me all these headaches."

"Neither this uproar nor this odour of paint and paste can be good, since you have a headache—" began Mr. Orrock.

"She doesn't mean physical headaches!" screamed Dr. Blood, "she means a spiritual—"

"She means *a—physical—headache,*" insisted Mr. Orrock.

"That she doesn't, then."

"Ah! She does."

"How tiresome," mourned Mrs. Gordridge, now rising, "come, let us go . . ." and she made her way back to the mansion with the painfully slow progress of grub.

That night at ten she sent down to the cot-

tage to find out if there was any sign of Shan; but Shan had not come back, and during the next day, the Wednesday, there was no coming nor news of him.

Meantime, the bridal preparations went bravely on, as if no Shan had vanished, the old lady believing what she hoped, that he must reappear: Rosie beheld herself in mirrors in hats which rolled with ostrich-feathers furnished from the Rue de la Paix, and in a new robe of sable as heavy as a bear; the wedding-day was nigh, the wedding-cake already waited white on the morning-room table, and Chuckabutty, the chef, who already was affording foretastes of tippy-cake, rout-cakes, and meringues, had now mayonnaise of salmon in the mind's eye; the cottage, too, was almost ready, the electric light, the piano, Satsuma jars were installed, and Dresden figurines costumed like milkmaids *en fête* and like gallants Louis XVI: Shan alone was wanting, and several days rolled by, but bore no tidings of Shan.

Each morning, each evening, a horseman was despatched to his uncle away up on the Chase to enquire for tidings: the uncle had nothing to tell.

“Never mind,” said Anne to Rosie, lacing

Rosie in a fairy pair of stays in front of a mirror, "don't fret, he will come. . . ."

"I should like to catch myself," replied Rosie: "may be never come."

"Be quiet, you know that you will be awfully annoyed if you are disappointed," said Anne, now tickling her with fixed teeth.

"Oh!" shrieked Rosie, darting off, shrieking with laughter, "don't tickle me when you know how ticklish I am! *Oh! don't!*" but Annie Hine with her long finger hunted her to the bed, on which Rosie gave up shrieking, and Anne tickled her there, till, kissing her, she said: "You see, you have altogether forgotten poor Arthur for O'Shannon, or you could never be so crazy with gaiety."

"A girl has got to giggle sometimes," answered Rosie, "according to the moon; if I laugh it is because this other one is gone to Kingdom-come."

"Never mind, he'll be here for the wedding-bells. . . . Poor me, I have no wedding-bells, you see."

"I should willingly change places with you, if you would with me," said the other, and Anne turning her face away, answered nothing.

But Shan did not show his nose, and Rosie,

half-drowning in her bed, had him now in the thoughts of her head, marvelling . . . for he was to be her husband, after all. She thought of death by accident over the quarry-cliffs, of suicide, of an arrest by the police for his recent riots: but all these seemed far-fetched: he could hardly be dead, inasmuch as his dog, which had gone with him, had not come back. With regard to Anne's guess that some sort of a league existed between Shan and Arthur, this was so very far beyond the scope of Rosie's comprehension of the heart of man, that it had no part in her thoughts at all.

But Shan did not come! "If he doesn't come," remarked Mrs. Gordridge angrily on the Sunday, at about the hour when the banns were being published for the third time, "I'll make him pay back every penny both of that first £75 passage-money, and of the second £75 that I shall have to spend: that is, if I can catch him."

"I doubt if Shan O'Shannon would prove quite a drowsy fish to catch!" replied Mr. Cochrane, her land-steward, with whom she was taking counsel.

The old lady had a face of care.

"Was there ever anything so unsearchable as this fellow's behaviour?" she asked. "What do

you think?—you are a man of the world—will he turn up or not?”

Mr. Cochrane, gazing down upon a ground made up of Persian Yellows just outside the conservatory-door, shrugged without answering.

“I have got three anonymous letters,” observed Mrs. Gordridge, “two giving me to know that we are never again to behold O’Shannon, and the third that we shall—illiterate scribbles: I take it that they have no weight?”

“Oh, no,” was the reply; “of course, the country-side, being in a fever, will write, but the notes mean nothing.”

“I dreamed of fires last night,” muttered Mrs. Gordridge, “and first thing this morning, on glancing out, I watched a crowd of crows going . . . Oh, well, we must only wait and see what the morrow brings forth.”

But the morrow did not bring forth Shan, and still the morrow after, the wedding-morning, wrought and dawned, but brought not Shan forth—a heavy November day, the third of the month, burdened with drizzles and breezes yearning in music through the yews and the dreary old cedar, with the sun low in Cancer at Hallowmas; and Mrs. Gordridge, learning the morning’s ugly news as she was getting her

fingers manicured in her chamber's recess, made the observation, "Well, I am quite done now . . . if he comes now, he shan't have her, for he was never half good enough for her."

But this was only what the fox remarked of the grapes! and, on going downstairs an hour later on Rosie's arm, a telegram which was handed her changed the old lady's temper to the opposite pole; the telegram being in the words: "O'Shannon says will arrive in time for wedding; earnestly begs you go to church. Davis."

So what was now to be done? That was hard for the wit of woman to argue out! for though Mrs. Gordridge gladly rushed from despair into elation—who was this "Davis"? No one knew at all! All that one could say of him was that his wire derived from Winchester. And why, if O'Shannon actually meant to come, could he not wire himself? What could bind him? Anne Hine was certain that the whole business of the wire was a hoax, akin to the anonymous letters; of a like view were Dr. Blood, Mr. Orrock, Mr. Cochrane; and in the council which lasted for hours into the afternoon they all argued roundly against Mrs. Gordridge's faith in the telegram; in vain, however: for when the clock struck two, she, too, struck her stick on the floor, and said:

“Come, let us go, as he begs us to: it will be lucky to be actually in the church, waiting, and then he will come.”

“Ah, he is *sure* to, Aunt, since you say so,” murmured Anne Hine: “but to go and wait in vain will be very distressing.”

“Oh, timorous people always believe there’s a lion in the way,” pshawed Mrs. Gordridge: “let us venture to go, and one’s very boldness will bring him. He knew that the wedding was fixed for two o’clock, and he is conscious that one can’t be married after three, so that’s his motive for enjoining us to be at the altar, so as to avoid delay when he comes. He will come, if we go.”

“There is, however, no train for him to get here by between now and three,” observed the clergyman.

“Ah, Mr. Orrock, do not argue with Aunt Margaret,” sighed Anne Hine, “since she is *sure* to be right.”

“I am only sorry to be the occasion of all this care, I’m sure,” now remarked Rosie with a saucy pout, seated near her mama all in silvery grey with a great white hat, waiting to be a wife.

“Never mind,” said Mrs. Gordridge, kissing

her cheek, "don't be angry with your mama: he'll come."

"But even if he is coming," said Dr. Blood, "why not postpone the wedding for one day—?"

"No, thank you," replied the old lady: "there never was a postponed wedding that didn't end in misery: either he has her to-day, or he never has her. So, come: he'll come. The man is keen to be married, and therefore will be: come."

She stood up, and within two minutes the carriages were off through the drizzle, to meet round St. Jude's a great crowd from far and near, whom Morgan could hardly induce to keep off the bright carpet spread for the bride's steps, many of whom, even when they had invaded the nave behind the bridal train, still found themselves crowded out in the rain.

And now in the chancel itself that stout heart of Mrs. Gordridge began to falter within her, and had in it the thought "be bold, be bold, be not too bold"; nor, when it became half-past two, and no news yet of Shan, could she any longer endure to sit tamely there regarding the gaunt laughs and shrugs and giggling shoulder of Rosie and her bridesmaids, but stole away into

the sacristy, where, as in hiding, she sat shamefacedly facing Mrs. Orrock's shame.

However, she had not been ten minutes seated there, when with a beaming countenance she was bounding out of her chair, breathing: "Thank heaven! just as I said . . .!" for old Pruie, a flurry of palish flesh, was there before her with the news: "Mr. O'Shannon, mum! at the cottage dressing—!" and Pruie had barely spoken, when in broke Anne Hine, saying very excitedly (for her): "Aunt, O'Shannon is now running down the village-street! . . . You are *always* right, dear Aunt, and I must always henceforth measure men by your standards."

IX

SHAN AND SONGS IN THE NIGHT

THERE, then, all among the palms of the altar, before ever the old church-clock groaned three, was Rosie united to her perspiring bridegroom by Mr. Orrock, who afterwards at the lunch asserted, to Dr. Blood's annoyance, that "the main functions of a clergyman were, after all, to be a joiner and an engraver": and before God they were joined.

As for Rosie, in what way she passed that day, in what world she roamed, she could never afterwards remember, for it is no fun to carle or girl (with only one life) to be married for the first time, and the Burgundy with the pheasants made all whirl in her girl's-brain; but all went off bravely enough without her consciousness, for throughout the afternoon into night the marriage-bells were breaking out into brabblings; when it was dark a bonfire blazed on the tump of the Morplepiece; and left alone with Anne Hine, Mrs. Gordridge said then, gratified: "Well, it went off very well: Rosie Jones is married: and O'Shannon is just the man

that I should have chosen as the ideal husband for her."

"Ah! but Arthur when he hears!" sighed Anne Hine: "for I am still convinced of a compact between O'Shannon and Arthur, only poor O'Shannon's back broke under it."

"All gammon," replied Mrs. Gordridge; "I have told you that Utopia is a curio for cranks, not usual in Europe; anyway, Arthur won't be getting to hear of the marriage for—months, it begins to seem, with these Boers fighting like fiends."

"But *if* there was a compact," said Anne, "poor Arthur will be fighting on the strength of it, and then he will come home with the D.S.O. to claim his reward, only to find his bride shaking up fat baby O'Shannon in her arms."

"Poor Arthur, it is rather rough on him," admitted Mrs. Gordridge: "but, after all, he lost her in fair duello, and the Gordridges always did beg for a stronger head than theirs to check and rescue them."

Anne nibbled a taste of cake-ice in silence, living on air, but delighting in tiny clandestine tit-bits that she nibbled like a cat; and presently she sighed: "So Shan O'Shannon broke down. . .

Human nature is a poor old pork-pie; but ah, Aunt, I don't mind admitting now that if this fellow had only proved true to Arthur, I might have lost what I call my heart to a man."

"Oh, you call it your heart," muttered the old lady; "never mind, my poor Doña Quixote, some other mirage painted on haze will arise some day to entice your admiration."

"You call it quixotic because the man earns wages," answered Anne, "but the heart is a red republican, pale as the red may be. We are all alike diseased with the need to 'desire and admire,' and those of us formed with robust digestions desire bullock's flesh and rosy-rich squires, and those formed with sicklier gorges have their greeds tickled by mirages and sunset gauds, and the kindred glories of the souls of heroes. We are things who crave and hate as we are made to: there's nothing quixotic in Nature."

"What about the Gordridge males?" asked Mrs. Gordridge; and she added: "knowing them as I do, it is a marvel that I didn't foresee when I adopted Rosie that Arthur would be going gushing some day after such a sugar as the child was—but then people never do foresee anything, except crops."

“We foresee, but are not too deeply concerned about our future self,” answered the analytic Anne, “and so leave it to fish for itself.”

“Anyhow, it is all over now,” said Mrs. Gordridge, “and Rosie Jones has turned out a good dutiful girl, doing without a murmur whatever I told her in all this marriage and China how-de-do, for she has some *nous* and sense in the pretty nut, ça se voit. . . . I should imagine that she has arrived now. . . .”

Rosie, however, at that hour was still traveling, though now close to Clovelly; and remote, each in a corner of her compartment, sat she and Shan without speech, till Rosie remarked: “Well, you have got what you wanted now, yet I don’t know that you look irrepressibly gay over it”; upon which Shan, rising from depths of reverie, looked at his bride, and he sighed, saying: “You little know, Rosie: they are not far out those who say that ‘there is a peace which the world cannot give.’ ”

“But—isn’t it precisely ‘the world’ that has given me to you?”

“Yes, but it isn’t quite you that I am thinking of now,” observed Shan.

Now the bride’s brows prettily puckered, and she answered with “side”: “I fear it requires

some sublimer mind than mine to pursue you in your higher flights.”

“You will some day, dear,” he said softly. “What I see and say at present is that there’s one certain star in the sky that’s sparklinger than all the rest, though all are sparkling, aye, and one certain lark in the Spring prattling prettier than all the rest—thank God for that.”

At this the bride’s left eyebrow cynically waved in despair of comprehending her spouse, for from the moment when they had found themselves alone in the train till now, he had proved foreign to her understanding; and she cast off her stole, for it was close in the compartment, and she flung open her mink coat with a jangling of things of gold hung at her wrist, and turned the leaves of her *Graphic*; and his eye-corners saw her lips split and reveal her pearls when what was comic in the paper tickled her, saw her face framed in her hair that was frivolous and buffo in front, though behind on her neck there was a gross club to it that was tidy, and her face framed in it looked so suave, like a dove in a grove, and the eyes so large and arch, she looked like winking at one almost, and her bit of a chin had a knob to it like the tump of the Morplepiece, and it broadened and stretched,

everything stretched easily, firmly, like gutta-percha, when she grinned at what was droll, and her bit of a nose turned up a bit: she was more like a picture-postcard, with an actress in colours on it, than like the ordinary bits of girl-flesh going about, she that was sprung out of peasant stock, too: it was wonderful.

With such thoughts Shan eyed her with his eye-corners furtively, till presently, glancing up, she asked him: "Did my Mama Gordridge question you to-day as to your queer disappearance last week?"

"Yes, she wanted to know," said Shan.

"Well, you haven't volunteered the information to me, but naturally, being related to Eve, I am dying. Where were you?"

"Oh, a fairish way off."

"A secret?"

"Not so very much of a secret."

"Then, I am all ears."

"No, you are partly eyes as well, and you know it, too, don't you, by gad."

"Don't swear over it."

"No, I said 'gad.'"

"Better say Asher in order to be above suspicion. . . . But I am all ears—and eyes."

"Not omitting the bit of a nose."

“Nor even the two bits of a mouth.” But as she said this, Shan, from leaning keenly toward her, sat up sharply and rubbed a round of vapour from his pane to look out at Devon darting darkly past him.

“Is the task of forming your manners, too, among those reserved for me?” asked Rosie.

Shan span sharply round anew toward her, asking: “What can I do to please you now?”

“I was asking where you were for over a week?”

“Are you sure it is ‘over’?”

“Quite.”

“Shows how you notice my goings and comings, doesn’t it? I couldn’t go a step without your hungering after me, could I?”

“Do I look pale and gaunt to you? Do I not seem to have taken all my meals?”

“No, you look pretty plump.”

“Ah, you see. . . . So where have you been?”

“Oh, a bit beyond Oxford.”

“Oxford? whatever for?”

“I said ‘a bit beyond’: open your ears and you will hear.”

“They are buried in my hair, that’s why a lady can always be a little deaf when she wishes.

Well, it was 'a bit beyond': was it a big bit or a little bit?"

"Whom are you getting at? A bit about the size of you."

"That all? Why, you could carry it all in your arms"—at which on a sudden Shan muttered something, turning away with shy eyelids.

"Well, why a bit beyond Oxford?" Rosie wished to know.

"Oh, a bit of business," said Shan.

"What, another bit? and what was the business? I'll have it bit by bit, if I can't in one bite."

"You won't have it any way, for you are a bit too curious."

"Is it a secret, then? Did you tell Mama Gordridge?"

"No, I didn't tell Mrs. Gordridge."

"Did she ask?"

"Yes, she asked."

"Tell *me*."

"Oh, everybody going to be married has a bit of business to get through: I won't trouble your head with it"; whereat Rosie remained stiffly silent for some moments, till she said again: "But by what means did you get to Glann-

court between two and three, since there's no train?"

"I bicycled the twenty-five miles from Gloucester," replied Shan; "yes, and I should have been at the church-door a quarter of an hour earlier, only my front tyre broke."

"Gloucester?" said she, "I imagined you were at Winchester, whence the wire was sent."

"No, I wasn't at Winchester."

"Who, then, is this 'Davis' who sent a wire from Winchester to say that you would be in time?"

"Don't you remember James Davis who used to live up on the Chase? That's the same."

"So you must have telegraphed to this Davis, telling him to telegraph to Glanncourt—"

"That's it."

"Whyever didn't you wire direct yourself?"

"Curious, aren't you?"

"Don't you like them like that?"

"I like *you!*—rather well, that is."

"Do you?"

"Ah, Rosie."

"Well, what?"

"I know that you will be the death of me yet."

"Why so?"

“ I can see that you will be killing me dead before we’re through: but I perceive and see that though you were as sweet as wild honey, there is what is sweeter yet than you.”

“ Why, what’s that?”

“ Rosie, I’ll give it into your ear: it is what people call ‘ the peace of God ’ in the heart, Rosie.”

“ Don’t swear, say ‘ Asher.’ You are hardly very understandable, Mr. O’Shannon, and I had no idea you were religious before, since you have a reputation among the natives for gallantry. . . . Be good, be good, be not *too* good. . . . But may be the religion is only a reaction from that roaring Sunday evening two weeks ago, the edifying story of which duly reached my ears. . . . Is it true that you threw Griffiths’ necessary nag into the village-well?”

Shan sat with shy eyelids silent.

“ You must be really terribly *strong!*” she said.

“ Aye, in the back and limbs, I dare say; but it’s the pheasant’s head that the guns go for.”

“ You can’t be very weak, even in the head, if that be true what you said in the book-room that evening that you haven’t kissed a girl since you kissed two one Sunday evening when you were thirteen.”

“What, you remember my saying that?”

“But is it quite true?”

“True enough: for very soon after that I started to fix my heart upon you, you see, where it has been fixed ever since; and that, and the wild-fowl, and the night-winds somehow, have kept me wilding and sound betwixt them.”

“Well,” said Rosie, and now, her pretty grin going out, her face was grave, “I am glad of that, for I’ll tell you now, Shan, that I am not such a goose to be altogether indifferent to what you are, or are not, in yourself, since I have to wear your ring on my finger, after all. Of course, some girls in my place would be crass enough to hate and spurn the sight of you, as I was nearly doing, for I have been having my little interior whirled in such a dream—ah, dear Lord, you can’t fancy it!—it was pretty stiff; and it was you that shattered it. But it wasn’t your fault, for it was not to be, it could never have been, the thing was a great deal too thundering grand to happen. So, though you are not likely to be under any delusions with regard to my sentiments toward you, for a girl’s soul can love only once in a lifetime, you know, still I don’t dislike you. My mama, but for whom I might have been a peasant, quite like yourself, I suppose, has seen

fit to heap me upon you, and I mean to try to take you with a curtsey, though with a certain mental reservation, and to make you as piercingly sweet a little wife as may be, if you on your side will always show a sense that an honour has been done you. There— isn't that a sensible little speech? Aren't I a good little thing?" But almost before the lips of Shan could open to reply to all this, the brake of the train began to grate, and he was up, shifting rugs and hat-boxes and the belongings of a lady.

They then drove to a hotel, and, as it was now late, by the time the bride, who was tired of her day's experience, had eaten a taste of supper, it was the bed-hour, the waitress looked drowsy, the town was drowned in the silence of night; so Shan led Rosie to the door of the chamber engaged for her, and, as he glued his lips to her hand in bidding her good-night, she felt the ague of his frame, and within, when he was gone, lingered a long time standing, gazing down with raised eyebrows upon the brush of eye-water which he had left on her palm.

"Now, there's no good our staying in one place," he said to her the next day when they were out seeing the town and "Nature," "for there's nothing like going the whole hog when

you're once in for a thing, and, as we are out to see England, let's see it. What a glorious day it is, too!—one of your grand scenting days for going out with a boy and a brace of setters that know how to retrieve, so as to beat broken ground and outside copses for old cocks, as I've done many and many an early November day when a boy with—Lieutenant Gordridge, we two alone together all the day long, and then the dogs. Glorious! I feel this day as if I could shout for joy, God knows. . . .”

“No, don't shout,” murmured Rosie, “keep it down till it bursts out of itself. . . . I never noticed you in a Trilby hat before, you look rather natty. Just tilt it a little on one side.”

“Like that?” asked Shan.

“Yes, that will do. . . . Oh, well, as to moving about, let that be as you will, for this place is silly, I don't like it a bit.”

For weeks now therefore they strayed about, roamed in those streets of Bideford down whose steeps Queen Elizabeth had stepped, and licked cream from their fingers in Westward Ho roadstead, having forgotten their spoons. Rosie was very restless, and Shan, ever boyishly blithe, eager to please the bride, galloped her here and there, noting the character of each bit of country

with his knowing eye, spending days in secluded picnic with her, for the weather continued good, and amusing her more museful moments with cargoes of yarns—no end to Shan's yarns, though all were in the same vein of poacher and pothunter, of this white China, and that black cock. At Newton Abbot, where they passed all an afternoon in the hay of a Dutch barn, he gave her the tale of the affray in the beat named "Deechley's," where when a boy he had got his thumb shot off, and cringing together from the rain under a rick in a coomb near Ottery St. Mary, she said to him, "you really know much more than people who have only read books," when, under the umbrella which sheltered them, he had told her of a hen that he had caught nesting one Christmas on an old wall in a spinney, of hens that assumed the plumes of the cock, and yet continued to lay, of a grouse-cock that he had found sitting on pheasant-eggs, a thing in a hundred thousand. Before many days were over Rosie began to gain glimpses new to her into the very hue and tone of his soul, into the lode of poetry that innately veined the ore of his nature, his old mateship with the winds that storm in March, and with stars of the dawn, and the seasons of the year, she was ever anew

amused at his enthusiasm for his youth, that adoration of the romance of his boyhood which made him yet a boy, at his disdain of the "gun" who struck a bird astern of the wing-covers, his stern brow and rancour against the brown rat. When, the honeymoon over, the train drew up at Albington, and Shan, pressing into his pocket the paper in which he had been conning the war-news, asked her if she was glad to get home, Rosie replied with a shrug and a sigh, "I don't know, I liked the going about: it might have been worse on the whole."

It was nine o'clock, the moon bright in the sky, and when the brougham that awaited them at the station had put them down at the Meadows-gate—for no carriage could get down to the cottage in its dale—they walked down to the pheasantry, to find before the cottage-door a small crowd of gardeners, watchers, woodmen, beaters, servants, waiting to cheer the ever-popular Shan and his still better half, and within, with arms half-opened for the smiling bride, smiled Mrs. Gordridge, and behind her—Anne Hine being absent at a neighbouring seat—peeped old Pruie and the new maid, the cottage now looking fairily strange to Shan, with electric jets showering down shimmerings of

azure over a table laid with snow and silver.

Nor, in the days and weeks that followed, was Rosie left without honour and satisfaction of soul, since some quite nice people came to call at the keeper's cottage, aware no doubt that this would please Mrs. Gordridge—Mrs. Blood, Mrs. Orrock, the Cochranes, the bridesmaids' families, and other good friends, to whom ice-cake and wine were given, and Rosie was gay, though all remarked that she had a cast of thoughtfulness and pale roses, strange to her.

It was not till mid-December that Anne Hine, who had been "spending time" in Monmouthshire, returned, and within ten minutes was hurrying with her smile down to the keeper's house, to cut a curtsey to Madam O'Shannon. It was evening, and the table down there stood laid for dinner, for Rosie could not yet bear those mid-day repasts of her spouse's past; but Anne found there only old Pruie, who, smart in cap and apron, broke into gaiety, crying: "Well, now! glad I be, miss, to see you again, and looking so hearty: why, I declare there's a touch of colour come in your cheeks. . . . Well, now! Be you just come?"

"Yes, but where are they?"

"Him be wire-fencing that new bit o' broom

abooove the top side of that nook-shotten bit they do name Newnes Covert, and her's gone to meet'n, for er's late."

"Good little wifie!" smiled Anne.

"Aye, to-night her's good, but wait, I got a lot to tell you, only it must be for nobody's ears but your own—a lot."

"What, isn't she always good?" asked Anne.

"Her do have her bad days and her tantrums, the same as anybody, look, but that bent what I do mean: there be something remarkably funny here, miss, oh, remarkably funny, and I've been itching for you to be back, just to hear what remark you'd be making when I did tell you."

At this those perfect nostrils of Anne that could discern from afar stirred and quivered, as she murmured: "Tell me now."

"Oh, not now," said Pruie, "they'll be here—Why, miss, it 'ood take me hours to tell you all, as only to-day Mary her said to me, 'I wouldn't do it,' er said, 'for it be double the work,' er said, 'doing the two bedrooms where I did only expect to have to do one, and I couldn't do it,' er said, 'no, nor wouldn't'—Here they come, I do believe."

Anne stood staring at Pruie, hearkening, too, to a sound of feet, a murmur of talk, coming

down the Morplepiece, and for a brief space, during which her brow flushed a pink as faint as vision, she could scarce fetch her breath, nor stir, for the pale pearl-colours of fantasy which now strangely circled in that workshop of her brain; then, moving to the door, under a growing moon she beheld Shan and Rosie approaching, he with gun and bag and dog, looking big to her, like a lithe god stepping down in the greyish light, Rosy gipsy-like in red and black with a wrap rolled about her head, and seeing them thus, without contact, though moving arm to arm, Anne Hine with her eyes fixed on the moon sighed: "Ah, that's a lad," and commenced to throw off kisses to them, which Rosie imagined were meant for *her*.

X

SHAN AND NO SONGS

SNOW lay ghostly over the arches of the Old Garden, and whitened its paths, the night was dark, and the stable-clock tolled one on the ears of Rosie and Shan going home from a servants' ball at the Hall, to which Shan, ever popular when fun was going, had been asked to act as M.C., and Anne Hine had opened it for Mrs. Gordridge (who had fled from it all), by dancing with Dover the butler, and then with the M.C., and Rosie also had waltzed with her lord.

Now, Rosie knew how to make herself look now a maid of sixteen, and now a lady of twenty-four, and that night in her evening-dress and white roses, with her waist cut out and rounded as by a sculptor's taste, was no day more than sixteen; so Shan, in adjusting her wrap, as they passed across the Old Garden, gave her a kiss, and was startled in it when the stable-clock tolled one.

"No, don't," murmured Rosie, when he kissed her, turning her mouth from him, but

still he worked about and kissed her, till the clock tolled one.

Not a syllable was spoken between them now till they were down at the cottage, which was all in darkness, though Pruie had left them a wood-fire which lighted up their faces when they sat on each side of it, and there at last the silence was broken when in a low tone Rosie asked: "Why did you?"

"It's nothing," answered Shan.

"I'd rather you didn't," she murmured.

"Why so? It's nothing."

"Well, we have been married for months now, and as it has never once before occurred to you to do it, let us go on now in the delightful old way."

"Can't I be a good husband to you without all that foolhardy bullsquitter?"* asked Shan.

"Precisely what I said. . . . Isn't that the very thing that I said? So why did you to-night more than any other night?"

Shan in his easy-chair stretched his frame and writhed, ill at ease, answering: "I don't know. . . . It's time to make a move to bed; I'd better turn on the light."

* Foolish nonsense.

“ No, I like this light. . . . If you want to kiss anybody, why don't you kiss Anne?”

“ Why, Rosie!”

“ She'll let you.”

“ Rosie, you had better mind what you are saying, hadn't you?”

“ She haunts you enough, and I feel certain that she suspects that you and I keep pretty clear of each other—I don't know *how* she knows, or what right any human being has to pry into my private life, and if I only find that that old Pruie has breathed one word to any other woman about me, ah, won't the old beast skip quick out of my house! As for you, Shan, listen, Shan, there was no need for Anne to dance with you to-night, and if ever you do again, or touch her hand, or glance at her, it'll be all U.P. between you and me, away I go, and you never see my face again.”

“ Why, Rosie!” cried Shan: “ well, I can't help laughing! Rosie jealous of Miss Hine. . . .!”

“ There can't be any jealousy where there's no love, can there?” asked Rosie.

“ No, I—suppose not. But don't get into such a fury over nothing! What, Miss Hine? A lady like her?”

“ Is she more a lady than I am? If you are

good enough for me, aren't you too good for her, with her face like a corpse, and her figure like a chair-leg? Did she never kiss you?"

"Miss Hine, Rosie? Oh, this is laughable!"

"Well, I believe you; but she wants to madly, and there's some sort of mischief going to come of it, so I warn you in time."

"There's not even the shadow of a shadow—"

"I know better, you see, for a man can't see things as a woman can. . . . Well, I suppose I'd better be getting up to my bed now."

"It's pretty late, too," said Shan: "I've got to lime and sand that upper aviary-run again in the morning. . . ."

"Have you? . . . So, then, that's understood between us: I'd rather you didn't."

"Would you? Didn't what?"

"You know."

"Oh, well," went Shan, stretching, "such is life. . . . Very well, since you're so stuck up, my lady, that settles it."

"You see, I have been congratulating myself so greatly on my immunities—all the more because I was so ferociously threatened."

"Did I threaten you?"

Rosie breathed through the nose two streams of smoke. "If I remember rightly. I think you

said one night before the wedding that, though a snow-flake, I was to be made to flush, and you chucked up your chin and clucked your tongue, and said Lord! I didn't yet know Shan O'Shannon, and I was to be fused like wax in a wildish fire, some rot like that. . . . You frightened me. But providentially your bark has proved far worse than your bite, for you are not really very terrible, Mr. O'Shannon."

As she spoke, a little clock by Boule just above their stooped heads hooted Two at them.

"Ah, well, there goes Two," said Shan, stretching, "I suppose I must be making a move now; I mean to have a hard day of it, sowing those open spaces in that east-covert bit of gorse with buck-wheat, and wiring them in from rabbits, and then liming that upper run. . . Well, I don't know, you might have a worse husband. Husbands are funny things, you see: you know nothing about husbands. Some husbands don't look at their wives after leaving the church-door—didn't you know that? Don't look at them. Not that I myself am such a very cold husband, if the truth were known, but—didn't I beg and implore you not to smother yourself in perfumes as you do? God only knows what it is you put on yourself, but it's something that

gets to a man's brains, I tell you, aye, I can scent it from here now, strong. I'd be a better husband to you—but for that. It isn't as if you were some other girl, but—you're over and above; with that fire-light jiggling about your face you look like a gay she-fiend leaped up out of—”

“ Hell,” said Rosie in a gross tone. “ But I'm sure I don't understand you one bit, for sometimes you talk like someone come from the moon. . . . At first it was all religion, and the peace of God in the heart, and going to church on week-days, and now that these raptures seem to have all gone cool, I am treated to a series of equally queerish moods, now fierce and storming, and now weepy and maudlin. You don't really wish me to give up perfumes, I don't understand why I am a ' she-fiend ' . . . Do you mean that in some way I tempt you? But you are married to me, after all, and though I do value my immunities, I have a pitying heart, Shan—Or do you mean something else? I never know how to take you! Aren't you happy, Shan? Is anything wrong? Aren't you well?”

“ Well?” cried Shan, starting: “ well, aye. *I!* One of the strongest men in England? Well, aye.”

“Don’t get excited over it,” muttered Rosie. “Something must be wrong, or you would never talk such a lot of rot, my husband, calling your wife a devil because she smells divine. . . . Do you know, I have always thought that you have a rather high sort of voice, anyone listening to us would take you for the woman, for my voice is deep, and yours—”

Shan started afresh, saying: “Well! Did you never hear me howl down a fox that sprang a beat of birds just as we were nicely pushing them into a clump, to shew to the guns? Womanish voice? This is adding insult to injury . . . !”

“Where’s the injury, or the insult? I don’t mean that it isn’t strong, but it *is* high-pitched, and your eyes twinkle like a girl’s reading a love-letter.”

“Well, what does that prove?”

“Heaven knows.”

“Ha! this is laughable! Ha! ha! ha! Rosie, don’t make a man out to be a fool.”

Rosie shrugged a shoulder, gazing over the failing flame, her naked arms on her legs, and presently their little clock told Three, and a storm arose in the dark morning.

“Well, I suppose we must be making a move,” said Shan.

"Yes, I suppose," said Rosie; "though I don't feel sleepy, my toes are cold, and feel my hand."

"Better take off your shoes and toast your toes, if they are so very cold."

"I think I will . . . and just fetch me a glass of chartreuse—or stay, I'll get it myself," and Rosie rose to go to a cabinet close by, soon to reappear in the fire-glow holding forth to Shan a glass of spirit that leered as greenish as bile.

"For me?" he asked.

"It's nice and warming," said she.

"None for me, thanks," said he.

"You don't know what it is like," said she, her mouth now full of pound-cake: "you try, it's nice."

"I think I'd rather not," said he.

"What, refuse a lady?" said she: "I have had some, so *you* have some."

"Well, if I must," said he, taking the thing, and raised it to his mouth, but before ever he had tasted, had the whole shot out upon the blaze, where it shouted and flamed. Rosie looked up from over the shoe which she was stooping to remove, asking: "Why, what is it?"

"It's nothing," said Shan.

"Well, I am cross!"

“No, don’t be that,” said Shan, “seeing that my head said yes to it, but it was my arm that said no, knowing may be that two drops of that draff would have me all in a flame. . . . That’s tricky, too, mind you! for it is just touch and go with everything, but things are made just to scrape through on the whole. That’s canny, after all! that’s fly. Perhaps each organ of us has a life of its own, and, given a good habit of action, they just muddle through by one another’s help, like those chaps at Waggon Hill on January the 6th. . . . Ah, now, talking of fighting, there, now, was a fight for you—At first there were only the Manchesters on Cæsar’s Camp, and some Imperial Light Horse and Sappers on Waggon Hill, then, one after the other, up came the Gordons, the Devons, the 2nd Rifle Brigade, and at point-blank range it lasted all the day long in a storm, those grand Boers fighting like devils, and our little beggars like gods, and just behind the hill the 53rd Field Battery and Blewitt’s 21st—”

Rosie, chewing cake, was holding up her toes to the flame. “How you keep it all stored up in your head I can’t even conceive, it becomes grotesque this minute memory of dates and names! Pity you didn’t go out yourself with

those Yeomanry, as anyone could see that you were wild to do."

"What, I, a man just married?"

"I think your wife could have spared you without sighing in her sleep," said Rosie.

"But suppose I had got killed—I say, would you have cried for me?"

Rosie rolled her eyes gravely round at him a moment, and then with a shrug said that she dared say that she should, since he was not bad on the whole; upon which Shan, leaning keenly forward, called her a blessed sweet, and Rosie muttered: "It is coming on again. . . . If I am so blessed sweet, why did you chuck my chartreuse on the fire? Let me give you another glass now. . . ."

"No, dear," moaned Shan tenderly, "some other night, not to-night. . . . What was I telling you? Oh, about that Waggon Hill affair! Now, you must know, Rosie, that, some time before this, on December the 8th, the Natal Carabineers, the Border Mounted Rifles, and the—"

"Oh, I am so sick of the war," sighed Rosie; "When is it all coming to an end?"

"Not yet awhile, it seems! . . . Ah, they are masters those Boers, I love them like brothers, even though they are bitterly hard on me."

“How do you mean, on *you?*” asked Rosie, anew rolling her eyes round at him.

“Because—it is so, dear,” he replied. “We all believed that the war would soon be over, didn’t we? not keep on for months, and months, and months, and months, like this. May God help us all! When will it ever be done, so that one may say ‘it’s over and done now, and here’s a day come in which a man can breathe free of the job of it’?”

“But why should *you* trouble particularly?” Rosie wished to know: “You are not even an Englishman yourself—”

“But who is doing this fighting mostly but the Irish?” asked Shan: “and if ever you hear of a deed more giddy gallant than all the rest, be sure there’s a dash of Irish somewhere about, as on that February the 22nd on Pieter’s Hill with those Inniskillings, and that Talana Hill affair on October the 20th, with the Dublin Fusiliers in the first line, and the—”

“Was the lieutenant in that battle?” asked Rosie at random, to stop the war-story.

Shan looked scandalized. “What, on the 20th, Rosie, when he only left England on the 11th? Wasn’t Lieutenant Gordridge at Magersfontein at the other end of Africa almost?”

"Oh, well, one can't remember dates and things," said Rosie, "I only know that he is somewhere, Mama Gordridge herself couldn't tell you quite where on the map, only you and Anne, so that's why she is in love with you, because in some ways you are birds of a feather, and it is a pity you did not marry her instead of me, she would have enjoyed your style. How she manages to be in love I don't know, for she has no vitals; but she is, wildly; it is like a corpse going whiter with passion. Perhaps it is only to imitate you that she is so well up in the dates and things, while Mama Gordridge takes it easy, though getting pretty disgusted, too, that the lieutenant hasn't distinguished himself—"

At this Shan started, crying out: "She be—hanged! Is there any sense in that, now? What do women know about campaigning? Let her wait, let the whole world wait! he will soon enough shew them the stuff a Gordridge is made of."

"But she has waited, and he hasn't done anything," murmured Rosie: "it strikes me, he is more for wounding girls than for shooting off guns, if you ask me."

"He is good at both, I dare say, as a gallant lad should be," said Shan, "but *he!* you don't

know him as I do—well, you couldn't: he is the king of the lot of them, he is—”

“ Well, I like you for saying it, Shan, after all the fury there was between you two, but I suppose as the victor you can afford to be generous, though you'll change your tune, if, when he comes back, he—”

“ Well, what?”

“ Carries off poor innocent me by force of arms! ”

“ What, you, a married woman?”

“ It isn't pious, but such things have occurred on this little earth: there was one Helen of Troy, not to mention the late—”

“ But Helen, she consented, she helped the lover, didn't she?” asked Shan, eyeing her askance; “ but you, now, you would say no, you wouldn't go, would you?”

“ Perish the thought,” said Rosie in a gross tone, and she siffled to herself through her teeth—edges the tune of “ Over the Garden Wall.”

“ But suppose he does take you ”—Shan snatched his chair a foot closer to her—“ I say, suppose—Well, when you are with him, and I am far away somewhere where no wave of the sea was ever swelled with Severn-waters, will you be remembering poor me, too, at times, Rosie?”

saying to him some night may be over the fire: 'there was once one that loved us both well?'

Rosie answered nothing, for, gazing now at a vision which she saw in the grate of the gallant lieutenant's return, she had scarcely heard, till now she found his brow bowed to her knee, when she pouted: "O my, what now?" and then more gently, "Are you sad about something, dear?" upon which Shan sprang up, walked through the room, and sat anew, saying "hark at the wind."

"What was it?" she asked.

"It's nothing."

"Funny chap you are," said she, "I seem to have married a mystery. Who would have supposed that you are like this? as full of changes as April days, so that you become one's occupation, and one hasn't the time to think of anything else when you're there. . . . Something's wrong somehow, and, as it is my right to ferret it out, I will: I'll tease, and tweak, and flog, and plague you, till I get it, for there's some secret. . . . Why, for instance, wouldn't you tell where it was you went to for three days a fortnight ago? That's one thing I'm going to have explained, and also why it is I have to wait for the birthday pearls when, by your own shewing, you should have

lots of oof to fling away? Are we hard up? and if not, why the waiting, and the eyes too shy to look me in the face? There *is* something. . . . And, by the way, who was that old woman—?”

“Old woman?”

“What a start! yes, old woman, Shan. What, is she another one of the mysteries, too?”

“I am afraid I am not aware what old woman—”

“Oh, there’s a fib now! so why did you start, as if I had stuck you with a red-hot poker? And you have gone quite white—Why, what’s up?”

“It’s nothing,” said Shan, cowering now closer over the dying fire, whereat Rosie cast a calf over her chair-arm, twisting round to stare at him, saying: “So who was she?”

“I have told you, Rosie—”

“But Pruie actually saw you with her!”

“Pruie? Where?”

“Under one of those clumps of spruce-firs in the middle of the west home-covert.”

“Pruie did? saw me with whom?”

“Why, with this old woman!”

“Oh, you keep on. Pruie must be raving mad!”

“No, Pruie isn’t, then: there is something in it, and I mean to have it. She says that last week some very old woman appeared from somewhere,

took a room at The Grapes for three days, got awfully tipsy on the second day, collecting everybody round her by jiggling the cake-walk in the village-street, and on the third day was seen talking to you in the covert. . . . Why on earth do you deny it? I meant to ask you, but forgot, not dreaming that there was any secret. . . . Prue assured me that the old thing jiggled and snapped her fingers into your face, and you grew red, and raised your arm at her, but afterwards gave her a brown-paper parcel out of your pocket—”

As she spoke the clock struck four, and “there goes Four,” groaned Shan; “Oh, God knows, I shiver with cold.”

“Tell me first about this old girl, and I’ll go so far as to warm you with a—”

“With what? What will you warm me with?” said Shan with an intense intolerance, starting straight: “not one instant more do I stew in this sty!”

Rosie stared up at him, asking: “Why, what now?”

“Rosie, it is four o’clock in the morning. . . .”

“Well, you could have gone to bed! Why didn’t you? You must like dissipation, or you would have gone.”

“Why didn’t *you*? Do *you* like dissipation?”

“ I love it.”

“ Ah, you, you’re a one inside, if the truth were only known,” said Shan with an accusing eye askance; “ ah, you’re of a deep dye, the brose of Satan’s own baneberry, if one was but in you to taste you, I dare say.”

“ Don’t you like them like that?”

Shan sighed helplessly to himself. “ But it is four o’clock, what is one to do?”

“ All right, let’s be good and go now,” said Rosie, “ the fire’s almost out. . . . As my shoes are off, I’ll allow you to carry me up.”

Her words were hardly uttered when Shan had her in his arms, and though he made quite a dash with her to escape kissing her, he had not the time, for midway on the stairs his mouth found out and was confounded with her mouth to the moment when at her door he dropped, or rather cast her from him, with such repugnance, that she went staggering, and he was gone, not to his chamber, but down and out into the air, where he ran some way into a belt of timber.

Out there with many eyes the heavens kept wake and saw a storm of wind whooping within a vault of sky all dizened with stars, for the half-moon had passed away, leaving the west as inflamed as a womb with after-heat where for

long her warmth had bloomed, and born in the east so far was no daub of dawn; so here he breathed easier than in that atmosphere of fog that he had been undergoing for three hours in the house, an inferno of vapours working foully without vent, like confined fire-damps, and smokes which smoulder hotly within the holds of cotton-ships. With Shan of late it had fared but too shabbily, since that Comforter of the renouncer, who at first had regaled him with carouses and secretly feasted him with gods, was gone now from him, as is Her wont, to test his soul, so that alone now he found himself dull on the mountains of endeavour. But out there where the wind blew through the cover, that was better, where, seated on the roots of a beech, he could watch the gale shiver greyly here or there over the grass, as it were thousands of mouse-ghosts arush with outstretched throats, and the grove roared to it in rondeaus, for now it was that yew-group yonder that took up the fugue, griped with the music-fury, and now it was this group nigher by that furiously took it up, as obeying the *bâton's* pointing, voice calling to voice, and now with a joyful noise all roistering joined to beshout the wind-shower's outrage—a hurricane so high, its flaws seemed,

sweeping athwart the twinkling bowl of the sky, to blow the stars all afflickering, Albireo and Aldebaran and the Great Bear, street-lamps in the Babylon of God; and Shan, seated with a drooped head on his beech-root, thus communed within himself: "It is late enough for such a gale, and for this snow, too, for I've seen three full clutches of eggs already, celandines are all out, flowering Sunday's gone, and the first broods of woodcock will soon be flying: but, then, this year is like no other year. May God have compassion upon a poor chap! I never thought it would be such a torment, no peace day nor night, like living in nettles till you are weak and shriek with hysteria, like trying to jump from your own shadow every minute, for months, and months, and months, like this. God knows, I'd fight a tiger, I shouldn't shrink, I am no coward, I'd fight five tigers, and worm out of it somehow, but by what droil is a man to wriggle out of the gripe of his own groin, get outside of himself, and flog his own soul? No doubt there have been chaps canny enough for such-like kinds of job, like that Julius Cæsar who overran France, and then he seized upon Britain, not to speak of him that went sweating up the steep o' woe that day underneath his weary cross; but

I! Am I one like that? Not likely. Do I look like it? Have I the walk of it, and the stalk of it? Do the chaps in the village see it about me when they shout out 'hello, Shan'? Not likely. So what am I, to be able to bear this bale on my back? Sprung from a dung-hill! My mother Martha O'Shannon was no angel, my father was just an average labourer-chap, born up there above the Chase, and though the pair of them did make me pretty quick on the pins, with a fair pair of optics, and a long lung, did they put just a pinch of sage, too, into the stew? I'm not sure: that will be curious to watch: but however that may be, I'm bound to it now, and though the blaze of a thousand devils devour my bowels, I'm bound to it now, I'm bound to it now. . . . Twice in this one night of sin and misery I've kissed her: twice: never again! that's death: death for her, death for me: never again! if ever once again, I glut my gullet with her, and end everything with the gun . . . but, God, spare us; spare us, good God! give a poor loon grace! and bring me not into temptation," upon which Shan's brow dropped down upon his arms, where it remained a long time bowed, till, staring up amazed, he saw that the night had transformed itself, and was broad morning.

XI

SHAN AND ANNE

THAT same forenoon, before Rosie had risen from bed, Anne Hine sat by her side, as was sometimes her way, bantering the bride, being indeed now far more frequently down at the cottage than Rosie liked in her heart; and when she said to Rosie: "Is it the dance that makes you so late in bed, or did you sit up after?" Rosie, with her own motives, replied, "Oh, we both sat up over the fire—such a jolly time we had! didn't come up till after four, and even then the gander kept on teasing, and wouldn't let his poor girlie sleep"—words which brought the interview sharply to an end, because Anne, irritated to the heart by them, now lost her temper, which she rarely lost, and making a lip-sound of impatience, muttering to herself, "futile little fool," got up, and was gone.

"Did she notice that I was enraged, I wonder?" she wrote in her diary that night—and let us picture this poor maid, her poor feet now erring fast toward tragic regions, writing there at a table late into the night in a soundless house,

her head, as she wrote, bent aside for her left hand to smooth down and down the left lobe of her hair—the emblem itself of musing. “Did she notice that I was enraged? Absurd of me to be angry at anything that that girl chooses to say, and still more so to shew it, if I shewed it. That’s hardly likely though, for it is my little way, I take it, to see the heart lie clear in the bosom like a pebble in a brook, but to remain unseen myself. I wonder if Shakespeare or Homer ever had such lucid interviews as I with the obscurer movements of human souls? Homer possibly, but scarcely Shakespeare, I fancy, for Shakespeare had sex, and sex, I feel certain, must infect the clearness of the perception, while I, without sex, am just like a being instinct with purged eyes of ice, sent down to the earth to observe the loom of the human bosom at work. And I seem to be as unseen as I am seeing, for how little do any of them know me! Miss-Mrs. Rosie, for instance, how far from any shadow of suspicion that all this time I am enamoured of the lad, and how far, if she did suspect, from being able to comprehend the springs of this craving, those nuptials of the grave which alone can console my hunger, that dark Dourga of death into whose arms I yearn to throw my

girlhood grossly, the lad and I together, he and I. Even if I were to explain myself, I should probably remain abstruse, since even to myself I am abstruse. Which, for instance, is it that I love—the hero or the heroism, the man or the huge manhood? If the man, why did I not love him before I knew of the manhood? Always, indeed, I have had a sort of desire in my eye-corner toward him, a leering, a leaning, something: but nothing of this craving. So it is the heroism, *not* the hero? or the heroism in *this* hero, because it is *this* hero's? Heaven knows! We can wash other people's backs, and watch other people's interiors, but not one's own well. And with what do I love him? There's only mind and body, and since I assume that I love only with the mind, then, should not my love be of a cherubic purity? Galba! The thin throes of the ghost of Galba returned to earth to gloat over the bones of his old gluttonies! I am a saint who prefers death to saintliness, I struggle in vain against my better nature, and the evil that I would that I do not. What an imprisonment! Fires of ice!—"the parching air burns froze": well, but there's a way out, and an hour of espousals certain for me also.

"This morning on coming back up from the

cottage, I had such a fright, for like a goose I had left the hat-box with the books drawn out from under the bed, *unlocked*, and when I got into my room, there was Nancy, sent by Aunt to see if I was there, staring at the books! I was awfully scared, but when she made some remark about "a lot of paper books," "paper books" made me laugh in a reaction of relief, and I mentioned that they were foreign tracts. I am now seriously thinking of burning them all, for really they do me no good, and are only a danger there. When I went down to Aunt, she wished to know with what motive I am for ever down at the O'Shannon cottage now! I answered something nonchalant, upon which she said: 'You are not so very fond of Rosie, so I don't understand, and on the whole there's something quite odd and unworldly about you lately, like a girl stung with the gad-fly: I hope you don't mean to go crazy, for I am responsible for you.' 'I thought I was too lucid to go crazy, Aunt,' I said. 'Well,' she said, 'your grandfather, Professor Morgan, was a great mathematician and lucid enough, I dare say, but he ended his days in a lunatic asylum.' I had forgotten about that, and somehow a cold something ached within me. . . . A mad mathema-

tician! like sunlight changed into the lunacy of moonlight! like ice rushing ravingly into avalanches! Then Aunt began to ask about the O'Shannons, if I thought O'Shannon a good husband, and Rosie happy, because when Rosie dined at the Hall on Monday, she had asked if Rosie was happy, and Rosie had too eagerly answered: 'Oh, quite!' though pale, and admittedly sleepless. Poor Aunt! she isn't a bad old sort of matriarch, and I'm sorry for her now—growing quite grey about the temples lately, had rather a shock about that scratch on Arthur's arm at that Abraam's Kraal engagement on the 10th, and will suffer no doubt to lose her Anne and her Shan in one swoop, and to see Arthur marry Rosie, after all—if he ever comes home. Ah, it was a canny, outwitting lad that you had to do with, my Auntie, wise as serpents, patient as God, good as a child, the bird-beguiler: and I like him well.

“ But *why* do I? Can't the hound in the head scent out the fox in the heart, and Anne effect the analysis of Anne? Is it because he is wholly unlike me? his soul so male in form, mine so female? I a sneak, intellectual, non-moral, sensuous, pigmy as a mouse, he a hero, hearty, all-moral, big as a mountain? There's at least

this one certainty about it: that the saint, the self-garrotter, *is* ever magnetic: 'great multitudes followed him,' and 'I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men after me.' It *is* so; and I can see why, inasmuch as a man, having said 'no' to the legion in himself, being now a chieftain and king, the kingless mob flock to his standard, for it is as if a mainspring had been wound up somewhere, a force all taut, rebounding, and this draws, as the pebbles rave after the withdrawing wave; or it is as if his inward friction breaks into flame, round which the moths crowd to burn their wings; so that perhaps, to compare the things of the spirit with material things, I am merely a shallop racing in the wake of a great ship, beguiled by the nose after all the throb and groanings of those gigantic engines. And not I alone: Aunt, not in the least knowing why, no longer regards the lad as a menial; Rosie, starting with her prejudice against him, and engaged all the time in dreaming of Arthur's return, still owns the big ship's suction, and dreams not of Arthur only, but of King Arthur. Of course, when Arthur comes, since to be mistress of Glanncourt is more glorious than the moon, the little goose will swoon into his arms, but for the present, anyway, my white wife is pretty hot

after the elusive vessel's draught; and the same with us all: Shan O'Shannon walks taller, there's some aura, some astral body, exhaled out of that travail of his soul, a halo about his head, which one feels without seeing; and the truth about *me*, I suppose, is, that with all that gorgeousness and its sunset my meanness is eager to associate itself, the shallop eager to go down in the foundering of the great ship, to degrade his death-bed with my body on it, to marry him in the grave, somehow to have him grandly, to drag him down at the last to my level, or mount to his, to die with him; for, dear, I do love you a lot, or at least strain to love you, longing ever so to fling my soul upon your strength; and you will indulge me, and be good to me, dear, letting my head be on your breast on the bed, admitting me once to be your bride, and I shall have one throe at last, sublimely guilty, and we shall go aslumbering.

“ Yes, there's a principle of explosion universal in the process of Nature, the earth having its volcanoes, the animal its rages, and whatever cannot explode at one vent will explode at some other, the philosopher exploding in tomes of philosophy, the poet in an epic, Hodge in a progeny of children, I in dying licentiously: for,

though a philosopher in your fashion, you can't garner your thoughts into an organon, Anne, you are a poet, but can't express your poetry, you draw and draw, but never really well, you would be breeding like Leah, but can never yeana breese, you are all null and neuter, and can only explode deathward. Let it be so. I have seen the sky at night, and by at least this one mind of mine in the deep of Time, if by no others, that sight has been highly admired: but why keep on seeing and admiring? Through that south casement there I can see it now again, now while it is still to-night, and my life has not yet glided into to-morrow, a sky as thick as a cornfield with stars, though the sickle of the moon is in it, and has reaped a rood amid-field: anew now, while it is now and to-night, I view it, soon to view it no more, and it with all its orbs will look for its orphaned child, but no more shall find me: for I be aweary, my hearties, fore-done with spurring and spurring o' myself, being neither good ghost nor good girl, but an uneasy half-and-half; and I'll end my trouble when the lad ends his.

“ But when? It seems clear that he does not mean to kill himself until after Arthur comes home, fearing, may be, that, if he should, Aunt

would banish the widow away beyond Arthur's reach. But, since Arthur may not come for months yet, it will be monstrous, both for me and for Shan, to wait till then, for I can remotely guess at the agonies that he must be hourly undergoing, and suppose at any moment he breaks down in this strain? If I could somehow spur him more quickly to the act, or separate him from Rosie, I would—in mercy to himself; and just possibly, by keeping my eyes open, I shall find the means, for he appears to be involved in difficulties outside the white wife trouble, since, if what Pruie says be true there's some mysterious old woman with whom he seems to be in some way ensnared, and, what is more, is he not at present *stealing* from the estate? Really, it looks so to me from what I can make out of the pheasantry-account! I wonder if he would do such a thing really, for any reason? That would be amusing! For though his reason for doing it is sure to be grand, still, stealing is stealing, my Shan, and that's grotesque to discover the angel Gabriel turned burglar. Certainly, the pinch of scarcity *is* in the cottage, I can see it—a rather astounding thing considering Aunt's bounty to the bride! So what has been done with all the money? I'll look into it and see."

XII

SHAN AND AN OLD WOMAN

AT a later date Anne adds: "*Why* is it nice to do naughty things? What a nick of perversity in the world which urges one to hearken and peep, to stick pins into people, to please oneself with tattlings and slanders, and the working of small mischiefs! for, if one can't be perverse in one way, one will in others. It is that same centrifugal vigour in man that causes the orbs to vault on their orbits: for there's a centripetal, or good, and a centrifugal, or perverse, and to the perfect working of the two the universe is due, since when one or the other rules ruin ensues, as I through being super-perverse will die, as Shan, Socrates, Jesus through being super-moral. At any rate, on the morning of the 29th I was listening at Shan's chamber-door with a pleasure all the sharper because of the danger I was in, for after being early out, and sketching Barclay's waterfall, I went down to the cottage just as the servants' call-bell commenced to sound up at the Hall, and there found Praia and Mary up

and about, with Bates who had just brought over the milk from the home-farm. Pruie told me that Rosie was 'awake, though not up,' so I was going up to the white wife's levée when I caught sight of the tail of a scarlet dressing-gown aflaut up there—she rushing out of her room down the passage, and I suppose I must possess a pussy-cat's step, or she would have noticed me—unless her mind was very preoccupied; anyway I heard her tap at Shan's door, heard him drone from his bed: 'Who is there?' heard her make answer: 'It is Rosie,' heard him cry: 'What, you? Come in!' and this made me mad, for I knew that she had never dared do this before, so I stole up to the door, just in time to hear her grumble to him something about coming to get her brown gown out of the wardrobe, upon which, hearing her open the wardrobe, I fled back a little, waiting patiently now for my maiden to step out; but she didn't come, and understanding presently that she had planted herself upon his bed, I stole right up to the door, which she had left slightly ajar, and hearkened.

“ I was there over an hour, and so profoundly agitated I never was, I felt so wicked, and moreover I was being pulled each moment between

fear of being found lingering there, and eagerness to hear. Once Snout paced out to me, his tail pounding against the door as he adored my hand; and from within everything came out clearly, the talk being all about the war first, then all about cocks and hens, pairs and breeds, Rosie sitting on the bed with her face turned to the window-roses, Shan always stretching his body, yawning, 'ah, well, such is life.' Lately she has been quite making the aviary her hobby, learning to treat the birds' diseases, to give them their green-feed, to seek ants' eggs, so that the pen-birds have got to know her well by now, and now this was all the talk, she first wishing to know, 'by the way,' how a certain cock came there, since there were no others like him about, to which Shan answered: 'Such things do happen, seeing that in the pheasant-farmers' pens birds of different species pair—unknown to the farmer sometimes—then those eggs going all over England hatch out hybrids, which hybrids are always changing their haunts: and three Autumns since a pure-white cock lived in that Newnes clump, that disappeared, and I've never seen'n since.'

“‘That's funny,’ remarks the white wife, ‘perhaps he failed to acquire any lady-friends in

this country-side owing to colour-prejudice, for some ladies do shrink from albinos.'

" 'Do they?' says Shan, 'are you one of them?'

" Her whiteship shuddered, going: 'Gur-r-r! I could not stand a very fair man within a mile of me.'

" 'That's why you will have none of *me*, I suppose,' says he, stretching, 'because *I* am fair.'

" 'Oh, you,' says she: 'well, your eyes are a very light blue, certainly, three shades lighter than mine at least: but, then, you have quite a dash of dark in your hair and moustache, which rather brings you into the running.'

" 'What, will I pass?' he asks.

" 'You might, at a push,' says she.

" 'That's one for me then, and I'll storm the fortress yet, if I only keep on trying hard'—and he stretched: it is strange he didn't drag his frame to fragments with stretching—'but, as to that white cock, that wasn't it why he went away, you may bet, for he left his mark pretty well behind him among the wild-bred fowl in the belts and brakes about, not to mention—you know Jim Price's lot of domestic fowls?'

" 'Well?'

“ ‘ This albino fellow came and drove away a Cochin China cock of Price’s, and also a black bantam—fought like a fiend—and then paired with the hens ’; upon which Mrs. Rosie reached out to the window to pluck some honeysuckle, saying: ‘ But did the domestic hens meekly bow down to the conqueror?’

“ ‘ They were all right.’

“ ‘ Oh, women are too treacherous!’ says she with a shudder and a pout: ‘ treachery’s in the very grain of the wretches. Myself, I hold with sticking always to one, don’t you?’

“ ‘ I do,’ says he; ‘ but this was a case of a white man marrying a black woman, and the hens’ heads were turned by it, no doubt, as even yours might be if the Prince of Wales, say, or a certain person, were to say to you, ‘ leave this miserable gamekeeper man and come and be mine.’

“ At this she ogled him archly, asking: ‘ Think I’d go?’

“ ‘ No,’ he answered, ‘ I don’t think that, I only see and say that the offer would be dazzling, though I would bet any day on you against it, seeing that men and women are made in the image of God, after all.’

“ ‘ Men are, may be,’ says she, ‘ but women,

I'm afraid, are made in the image of Mrs. God, who has an ancient flirtation with Satan, so that's why Satan was chased—'

" ' You do say things, Rosie,' says the lad.

" ' I quote Mama Gordridge, who by " Mrs. God " meant Nature, I suppose,' says Rosie; and fingering up her *négligé* knob of hair behind, which drooped half-loose under the violet tassel of her scarlet tarboosh, she asked: ' But how did they get on, the hens? Those must have been outlandish looking objects that came from the resultant eggs.'

" ' Aye, things with a fowl's legs, and a pheasant's tail,' says Shan.

" ' Puts me in mind,' says she, ' of that blackcock you have, how he has disported himself with those three pheasant-hens—O, really, that was too much, one couldn't help laughing.'

" ' When was that?'

" ' Yesterday afternoon. You should have seen them.'

" ' Should I? So what took place?'

" Mrs. Rosie pores over one of her morocco sole-slippers in her hand, smiling to herself, as I could see, though a mist was before my eyes, and my knees weak beneath me; and she says: ' Darts and daggers took place, for first of all the

blackcock dug his beak well into the pheasant-cock, and chased him clean away, and then he came stalking back to the ladies like a lord.'

" 'Did he?' says the lad, and, peeping, I could see him lying with his head raised on his arm, not looking at her at all with his dead eyes that gazed straight into vagueness, his face grey but for one daub of scarlet like a brand over one cheekbone, his bosom moving beneath his wool-len night-jacket; 'did he?' says he confidentially: 'so what took place then?'

" 'You should have seen them,' says she in a little voice, grinning: 'the blackcock began to court the pheasant-hens, as if they were birds of his own feather—oh, great Golgotha! he *did* carry on.'

" 'Did he? How did he?'

" 'Well, you know how blackcocks do throw themselves about when they want to be irresistible—he tossed his tail on high, and went stalking about with it arched in the air like a turkey-cock, turning out all his charms for admiration, calling the love-call, and those scraps of crimson skin over the eyes, they poked right up, growing more gross, till his head got quite a crested look with it.'

" 'Fancy,' says he.

“ ‘ You should have seen him,’ says she.

“ ‘ Oh, well, such is life,’ says the lad, tearing his frame in a stretch like a wretch on the rack, and I could almost feel with him how easy just to reach out his arm and reap her, and, ah, how hard to love an hour hence more than now.

“ Now she, leaning round to him, her elbow on his knees, says: ‘ What’s the matter? You don’t look well.’

“ ‘ It’s nothing,’ he answered: ‘ I don’t sleep at night.’

“ ‘ Neither do I: and, Shan, I can’t bear it much longer, I must see Dr. Blood, for—’ but at that moment the breakfast-gong began to clang out below, and now she pouted: ‘ Oh, silly! why, we haven’t even had our baths—’

“ ‘ Go, dress, sweet,’ he panted at her, smothered.

“ ‘ The breakfast will go all cold,’ she almost whispered, ‘ I had better order it up, and we will have it here on the bed, and make a holiday of it—shall we? shall us? Say yes, and, Shan—’

“ They were pretty breathless, both of them, though I couldn’t see the look in their eyes, she was leaning so over him, her fingers combing the tangle of his hair; and there, though I knew that she might be rushing out at any moment, I

stood rooted, unable to swallow, waiting for the outcome, till, to my amazement, without one shade of the agitations of two moments before, he was uttering the words: 'Rosie, you smell badly of onions—'

"Poor white wife, she had not a syllable to say, was so taken aback, that she at once raised herself up, and though I was at once away, came out so quickly that she saw me at the stair-head, and said a 'you?' that would have made milk sour. I called her 'lazy' and 'luxurious,' said I would stay for breakfast, then went down and spent a few minutes in gossiping with Pruie, and in glancing at the white wife's diary, which she leaves about—such a diary! nothing in it, pages taken up with attempts at housekeeping accounts, others full of nothing but her name, 'Rosie O'Shannon' repeated a hundred times, and thrice there appears 'Rosie Gordridge'; then, looking out of window upon the garden for a while, I stood thinking of 'Rosie, you smell of onions,' and couldn't then, and can't now, help marvelling at this man's craft! his wit, his nerve, his squirrel versatility, the virtue and vigour of the working of his divine sagacity! The high-born! For as though it was some god, his Father, who breathed the words into his ear to

say, they seem to me now when I turn them over, perhaps the only words in the whole of speech which could have really rescued him, and wrenched sudden victory out of the very mouth of rout. Well, down Rosie rushes presently in her old roan-velvet robe, looking flushed and morose, but just as ravishing as a rose, one must admit, the tarboosh still stuck ajaunt on her head, and soon after her, in his Norfolk-jacket, in strolls my saint all haloed and smiling; so we sat to the warmed-up eggs, but had hardly begun, when there was a knock at the door, and Mary came in to say that an old woman who gave the name of Mrs. Graves wished to see Mr. O'Shannon. Oh, Shan! whatever is the matter there? I never saw anyone go so ghastly all in a moment! '*Graves?*' says he, 'all right, tell her—' and his whiteness suddenly rushing into red, out he dashed, while the white wife and I stared after him with wonder, she getting up to go half-way to the room-door, where during fully eight minutes she stood hearkening to the altercation outside the house-door: and, whoever Mrs. Graves may be, she is evidently a very gay old body, for I could hear her giggling, and Shan frequently going '*sb-b-b,*' in an anguish to her, but I couldn't catch anything else, save an exclama-

tion of 'Gawd bless us' from the old thing.

"Presently Shan returns to us looking gauntly stern like one come through an ordeal, and Rosie begins the questions in a 'may-I-ask' sort of tone: Who was this Mrs. Graves? the same old woman who had previously been seen with Shan in one of the coverts? 'It's nothing,' was the sum of Shan's answers, and though she got him to admit that this *was* the same old woman, he soon grew angry, put his foot down, and shut up the questions.

"Well, we had hardly breakfasted when Cuthbert ran down to call me for Aunt, and I spent most of the day over accounts and letters, seeing or hearing nothing of the O'Shannons till after eight in the evening, when Pruie, in a state of excitement craved 'to have a word wi' me,' and at the conservatory-door I saw her, bursting with the news that Mr. O'Shannon had had another meeting with the old woman at the same spot in the covert, a stormy meeting at eleven in the morning, which Pruie herself had witnessed—'since it bent much that can go past me, miss, and I be as sharp as a needle with two points,'—after which interview Mr. O'Shannon had come home, only to go out again about noon taking with him—a parcel. What was in that

parcel? Pruie had found out—a good half of the household silver—part of Rosie’s dowry—kept in the bottom drawer of the small wardrobe; and as Mr. O’Shannon had taken the 2.16 train to somewhere—everyone in the village knew it—and as he had not come back—without the parcel!—till seven, Pruie could only conclude that he had gone to some town to pawn the silver, in order to give the money to this unknown old woman.

“What a thing! What a mystery! Pruie’s ancient flesh shook palely at it; and then the tale of what had taken place when Mr. O’Shannon came back weary and grumpy at seven o’clock. . . Pruie had never seen him at all like that, except that once when he went wolf-mad with the drink before his marriage. The white wife was at the piano playing when he came in, so she got up to him, and began to ask him where he’d been to, but he, without answering her questions, began to *thee* her and to *thy* her in the broadest Gloucester, smiling down bitter upon her, telling her, ‘yes, thee thinkst that I do love thee, but thee dussn’t know how I do hate thee, thee dussn’t know all’; so she looks up at him in astonishment, going paler about the nose, and er says to her, she being nicely dressed for

dinner in her green with the hanging sleeves, 'yes, thee thinkst thyself a queen because thee's clothed in these gaudy bits of togs and gold, but dress thee in rags, and thee'd be nothing to look at, for it be fine feathers that make fine birds'; then he throws himself down on the sofa with his legs stretched out afore him, and after a time er says to her: 'My feet are sore, get me my slippers,' upon which she couldn't speak, she was so taken aback, then she calls out: 'Pruie! get Mr. O'Shannon's slippers,' but he now flushed up, crying out: 'Get them yourself!' his cry tripping out tremulously high like a trumpet, 'am I your husband, yes or no?' and again she stood silent, eyeing him in an ugly way, with her lips glued malignantly together; but his command could not be disobeyed, so she went, got his slippers, threw them at his feet, and ran and locked herself into her room. Pruie heard him later on implore her outside her door to come down to dinner, but she would not, nor would he have any dinner, and before eight o'clock went out in his rough clothes; soon after which, she, too, started out somewhither from the cottage in a flurried way with her lips fixed, and had not come back since.

"Such was Pruie's account of things. I sent

her away, read Gibbon aloud all the evening to Aunt, and at about two in the morning, the house all soundless, just as I was getting drowsy myself, nibbling a bit of biscuit over my sketch-book, there greeted my ears, like guns going off, an agony of knockings at the front, giving me quite a fright. Divining at once something of the truth, and running out of the morning-room to the hall-door, I found Shan there, and, the moment I saw his face, thought to myself 'Rosie has run away,' my heart bounding with joy, though I had a twinge of sorrow for my boy, too, he looked so bad. 'Is Rosie sleeping in the Hall, Miss Hine?' 'No.' 'But are you sure?' 'Quite sure.' Down dropped his head, his gun dropped to the ground, and Snout, gazing up into his face, growled thinly. 'Never mind, Shan,' I murmured, 'no doubt she will be found'—first time I have called him Shan. He told the story: had left her locked in her room, for there had been a tiff, and soon after he had gone out, she, too, as Pruie recounted, had gone out—he now knew why, evidently in order to induce someone or other to remove one of her trunks, which, after Pruie and Mary had gone to bed, had been very quietly taken away; and he, on getting home near two, having reason to suspect that

she was not in the house, had peeped into her room, and found the bird flown. Poor white widower! he tried to be brave, but the words wavered in his throat, and I passed my palm over his hand. 'So what next?' I asked. 'I'll knock up the village!' he suddenly trills, with that gallant high tremolo of his cavalry-commander's voice, and he turned, and was gone, taking my heart with him, I gazing after him all the way across The Meadows, seeing him quite clearly to the very gate, for a moon as full of moon as a drop of fluid is full of fluid bloomed bellying through a welkin without one cloud in it, where stars were faint and few, suffused with her glory, she looming some huge ghost-Argo cruising bemused through countries far remote from home all among gold-rock and opal archipelagoes of Esmeraldas and Eldorado. I was kissing my hand after him, when there came Mrs. Macfadden soft-footed and belated behind me, in answer to his knock—must have seen me kiss my hand! concluding, of course, that I was kissing it at the moon. . . .

“Well, by the first post next morning, Aunt had a note from Rosie asserting that, having been grossly brow-beaten by her husband, she had fled to the Waggon-and-Horse, at Greames:

at which my Auntie makes a great show of indignation, though I told her that it wasn't true, and says, 'O'Shannon must be given a lesson.' So, soon after breakfast, groom Bassett was called, warned that what he had to do was as secret as the grave, and I wrote a note to Rosie, giving her to know that the brougham would be sent for her at midnight, and gave it to Bassett to take to Greames, Aunt entering with zest into the game, not caring that what was game to her was woe to the poor widower; so, with as many secrecies as screened the flight of Marie Antoinette, half-an-hour after midnight alights my white wife to our arms, taking herself pretty seriously, declaring that she'd '*never* go back,' giving at Aunt's bedside the cargo of her injuries, though ne'er a hint as to her whiteness, that, I suppose, being a sore too secret even for 'Mama's' treatment, though when Aunt said: 'Forgive him this time, you will like him better when he buys you a nice big baby up in London,' I heard her murmur to herself: 'Yes, when he does.'

"Meanwhile, the widower was away on some wild-goose chase after her, and did not get back to Glanncourt before noon the next day, when, comforting himself no doubt with the half-hope

that she might have come home, he flew to the Hall for an interview with Aunt, who accorded him an audience in her cosy-corner, listening with those cold glances of hers to the story of his tracing of Rosie as far as 'The Waggon,' where he had lost her, while the white wife and I took turns in eyeing them through the key-hole. Oh, he looked careworn and browsick! and I thought to myself that his great heart had enough to bear without that girl's absurdities. 'Dear me, where can she be?' wondered Aunt, and 'what can be her motive? I hope that your behaviour to her has at no time been overbearing, O'Shannon, for in that case it is no wonder—' Poor lad! you, too, had to undergo King Arthur's greatest indignity, to be lectured by an old woman; and you took it as greatly. 'The marvel is,' says he with a brow all one crowd of troubles and crosses, 'that she hasn't written you a line, since she must have very little money with her—' 'Ah! there's the marvel,' says my Auntie, and so they kept on, till finally he gets up grimly with: 'Well! she has got to be found, if she is anywhere above ground,' and the silly game came to an end.

"This thing was kept up for three days till the evening of the 11th, when I would bear to

see him in his agony no longer, for near three in the afternoon of the 11th I saw him on the lawn from a window, and he looked so castaway, that though in my heart I revelled at his separation from Rosie, I made up my mind, since I knew that the separation could not be maintained this time, not to be selfish, but to finish it that day: for such a silence had been imposed upon the household, that I knew it might be some time before the secret leaked out to him; so, passing with Aunt in the motor-car that afternoon through St. Arven's, I suddenly remembered an important postcard to be written to Mr. Cochrane, entered the post-office, and sent the lad a telegram from 'Guess Whom': 'Your wife is at Glanncourt.' I felt pretty treacherous, but, then, 'treachery is in the very grain of the wretches,' as my very elementary white wife has declared, for the snake must have stung Eve in Eden, leaving its virus in the vein of her, so that her girls remain snakes-in-the-grass ever since, for certainly we do find it nice to act 'on our own,' and outdo folks on the sly. Anyway, we hadn't long got back to Glanncourt, when a most agitated lad was before Aunt, panting: 'Mrs. Gordridge, Rosie is in the Hall and you've got to give her up to me.'

“Aunt, for her part, was tired of the game now, no doubt, so Rosie was called down, and oh, the mountain of cloud that rolled from that lad’s brow, and the light that arose on it, when his eyes beheld her at last! and while my white wife stands stiff by Aunt’s side, glowering gravely at him, he gazing mainly upon the ground, fingering his cap round and round with a chronic smile on his mouth and little glances upward at her, Aunt gives a discourse, and, pronouncing them happy ever after, blesses them both. . . . Ah, my Auntie, there’s a grand old mass of humbug agrin somewhere in the grain o’ thee.

“So away they went, Adam and Eve, he as humble as a babe, I peering after them till they disappeared behind the stables, and during all the seven hours between then and now, it being now half-past two in the morning, my heart has been heavy for him, thinking of those oceans of temptation which must have broken over that brain this night above every other night: for the joy of finding her fell so suddenly upon him, that it must be enough to upset the poise of a giant’s mind, and then he must feel that she expects him to shew his pleasure at finding her in at least kissings and pettings—as a mere matter of politeness. How awkward and hard for

him! Has he refrained from even one kiss? Even one kiss is treachery to Arthur. Yet how is flesh to attain to so much as this? And if he has allowed himself kisses, what then—? Ah! unless he is built through and through of the very swartest sort of basalt, if there's one smallest flaw anywhere in the water of that diamond this night, then, it's all up with the apple-cart by this time—and through my own doing, too.

“ But I think I know in whom I have believed, and bet that to-morrow I shall see him lean, but smiling. Only, how long? Is Arthur *never* coming? It is three months now since Lord Roberts entered Pretoria, and still our little war roars prettily on to everybody's surprise, Arthur, by the latest account, refitting at or near Zeerust in the far Western Transvaal, after taking part in Methuen's futile pursuit of De Wet; so I shan't wait for his coming, if I can rush Shan faster forward to that death-marriage of him and me, as I think that I can: for, let me only once get him really separated from Rosie, and he will be only too eager to hasten a little sooner to that grave to which he has appointed his youth, just at which point Anne will come forward to join him as consort and convoy toward that goal to

which he thought to voyage alone, and will go far with his ghost.

“ Or am I a little ninny, dancing mad in a castle in the air? There was once a little girl of thirteen at Carlington named Louisa Hastings, who, seeing Dr. Blood go by grandly dressed every day in his trap, conceived the idea that he was the king of somewhere who only went by daily so as to exhibit himself to her, meaning some day to make her his lady-queen; and in this sweet disease the little dear’s wits revelled in secret for weeks and weeks, till one evening her father revealed to her that it was all a dream: so the next morning early, walking in her night-dress down to Severn, she sat herself down on the shore, and patiently waited till the tide rose and drowned her. Though I was only a nipper at the time, it made such an impression upon me . . . O, waning moon, wasting like a cloud at your upper edge, quite spoiled now, like a Madonna’s countenance anguished with a goitre of gumboil and swell-jaw on one side, you are unwell of too much light in your monthly way, like that mad, mad mathematician, my worthy ancestor: for a germ of turgidness and dissolution lurked in the most lucid moment of your fulness, aye, and there’s a taint of lunacy, ma’am, in all your family

“ But, if I am a dreamer, I cannot quite see at what spot the dream commences, for it doesn’t seem unreasonable to believe that an elementary body like Rosie *will* abandon a too white husband the moment she sees him in disgrace; and his disgrace I can easily bring about by simply revealing about the stealing: for that he *is* stealing, both eggs and fowl in a big way, I no more have the least doubt, and though I couldn’t quite clearly prove it at this moment may be, I’ll soon be able, if his lack of money keeps on. What excuse the fellow can possibly make to himself for doing this laughable thing, Heaven only knows! it is far enough beyond my wits to divine, I only know that his motive must somehow be as white as snow. But the lot of money that he must have run through within the last months! How? How? It seems to be really to this old Mrs. Graves that he gives it . . . ! *Who* is she? How gross of me not to guess! It is as though he had committed ten assassinations, and this old jade, knowing of them, were able to wring blackmail out of his very brain. Anyhow, the old thing is doing good for *me*, for, though I do grieve for my dear, the more money she drags out of him the nearer grows the hour of my throe, and I am so keen now on speeding the

wheel even more quickly downhill, that I seriously mean, if I can find out where he keeps his money, to sneak it from him: for the poorer he's made, the more he'll steal, and the more he steals, the nearer his disgrace, and in the hour of his disgrace Rosie will leave him, and he, once left alone, without any reason to keep on living, will gad gladly down with me, down, down, in that hour of our outing . . . unless by chance I be reeling dream-drenched in some region of dreams . . .?"

XIII

SHAN BANKRUPT

“THE result of Rosie’s flight,” Anne adds at a later date, “was a day of extravagance at Gloucester, whither she and Shan took a journey the morning after her return to him, and there made their money fly like a pair of children, she buying two new brooches, breloques, a wrap, a pèlerine, a kimono, two gowns, he lavishing upon her whatsoever her heart desired, the fact, no doubt, being that his delight at seeing her about him once more had half-turned his brains, and, unable to express himself in caresses, he exploded in this spree, hearing no doubt all the time with one ear a whisper from to-morrow that he couldn’t afford one penny of all these orgies, and with the other ear hearing that street-organ of to-day to which he was jigging.

“She, for her part, I suppose, remains ignorant of the pawnings, and can’t have any notion of the pass he is in with regard to money, or, not being a bad-hearted one at bottom, she would hardly let him rush into these sprees to

please her. But neither of them is much good at money-matters, though he is said to be a rather sharp bargainer in the market, while as for that girl, if she was a millionaire, she would soon be poor. If Aunt hadn't taken her up, I can trace exactly what would have been her fate and story: she would have been blown in some storm to Bloomsbury, bloomed into a music-hall star, and ruined a man per annum.

“ But what must have been *his* remorse and bitter after-taste when, just as he was going out of doors on the second morning after this Gloucester bout, little thinking of his ghoul, may be, there she was again before him, the gay old thing. I was running round to the farm at about ten a.m. when, at the bottom of the north home-cover, I saw Pruie standing with a cocked ear, and, stealing near, I startled her so, that she had to clap her palm over her old heart! ‘ Him be wi’ the old woman this minute in there,’ she told me, and instantly, though I was in a hurry to get back to the guests, a greed took me to see and hear, so I chided Pruie for playing the spy, and the moment she was well away, was on tip-toe in the covert, nor had gone thirty yards up the grass-ride when I heard the old girl cry: ‘ Good reason why!’ and a moment afterwards

Snout's nose poked out of a thicket at me. I got sideward through a lot of gorse, and, stealing forward by degrees, spied them together under one of that group of roosting-evergreens, she at that very moment cutting a jig, arms akimbo, he smiling down upon her, snarling bitterly, 'pity you're such an old boozer, after all; why, you are half-seas over now.' '*Am* I an old boozer? *Am* I? What price that?' and she snatched and dashed straight into his face one of those pieces of meat that they hang up for the poults to peck maggots out of. He took it smiling, though with such a flush and lightning eye! 'Oh, I'm not afraid of you,' says she, 'so don't think it,'—talks Cockney, and, I conjecture, belongs to the lowest of the lower orders, wearing still a shawl like a law of Nature, though otherwise quite dressed—'but what about that money? I don't see why you couldn't let me have it now.' 'I have told you,' says he with passion, 'that I shall have it here at half-past eight to-night: just ask yourself how in the name of God a man can give it you now, when he hasn't got it to give'—and I saw his mouth go weak, and work. 'All right,' says she, 'I won't be hard: half-past eight it is.' 'On the condition, mind you,' says he, 'that you keep sober all to-day, leave by the

9.3 to-night, and let me hear no more of you for the next three months.' 'Garn,' says she, 'not so much of it: you have it here at half-past eight, or over goes the apple-cart. . . . Ta-ta,'—and with airs of the absurdest levity she turned and went, he glowering after her down the grass-ride till she vanished, then, as if shot, dropped to the ground under the fir where he had stood, and fast though my heart was thumping, and all in me urging me to fly, I could hardly turn my gaze from the sight of his grief, till I heard him sob with such an outburst of distress, distractedly shaking a brow bowed low beneath his burden of adversity, when, able to bear it no more, I stole away.

“How great must be the power of that little old thing over him when at that very hour all the guns and beaters were awaiting him half-a-league away! and a poor day's sport, too, they had of it, as I gathered in the evening, for the very good reason that so many of the year's birds have been privately turned into money by the head-keeper! O, Shan, your feet be pretty deep in the meshes. . . .

“But not for long now, I think: for after what I did to him last evening some sort of crisis seems certain, since he can't have much that's

portable left to pawn now, and what I have done to him now must reduce him to penury. I knew that his rendezvous with Mrs. Graves at eighty-three must mean more pawning, so near dinner-time I smuggled myself from the house-party, hurried down to the cottage to see his return from his pawning trip, and was chaffing Rosie about her huff at not being asked to join the party, when in he walked. She wished to know where he had been, and as he shuffled and was sullen, I was sure now what he had been at; but though long ago I had made up my mind that, if ever I got the chance, I'd take money from him, that day such a thought hadn't entered my brain, till I observed him rather furtively push a pocket-book behind the clock, and at once I felt myself turn white at the whisper of something wild within me that I was going to pilfer it. Oh, never again, Anne! the effort of soul is far too great, the derangement and shock to the whole organism, like going under chloroform; and yet it was nice, too, perhaps because of the very storm, the business, the sin and pity, of it. I got straightway into a harsh sort of mood against him, short-breath'd, like a school-mistress going to flog a girl, thinking, 'it is for your good, and you have to be well peppered,'

and when, on their dinner-gong sounding, we went out of the room, I ran back to get my handkerchief, which I had left behind, and laid hand on the pocket-book.

“ When I sped away up to the house with it in my blouse, it was now night, a wind was sounding, and there in the south-east swam the moon actively moving in and out among masses of cloud-vapour with the genius of some scene-painter brandishing a cherub’s brush; and I felt myself more a creature of those countries which she sketched than of this earth, for it is one thing to dream and purpose, and another thing to act and to have acted, and I felt like anybody but myself. Oh, I was off my little chump! and all last night, and all this day, I have been far out of myself, a thousand miles from the scene in which I have been smiling and chatting and reading heartlets, nor have I dared go down to the cottage to witness that anguish which is undoubtedly there. The pocket-book is stuffed with forty pounds in notes, with them being a sort of receipt from a Bath pawnbroker for a number of articles, including Rosie’s two just-bought brooches! How urgent must be the spur, how throttling this rope that’s around his throat! And when he went back to the clock to

take this money, obtained at the cost of so much shame and care, to take it to the old trapes at half-past eight, and could not see it there, and could not trace it anywhere, so pale must have been his despair! Really, I have half a mind even now to let him have it back! but then, no, for your sake, dearie, and my own, I being awearry now of waiting and living, for a spring in me has run all down, never having been tautly wound, the very mainspring of me and spring of my being, and my arms hang dead, my spine gives way, I begin to yawn at God. For the last three weeks I have been keeping in my pocket a sheep's shoulder bone at which every now and again I give a peep, having gained now such a consciousness of Nature as to view living things as nothing more than clocks, and man I regard through a glass on Mars. . . . 'Thou hast made me of skin and flesh, and fenced me with bones and sinews': beautifully done, of course: but there may be more enjoyment to the watchmaker in watching his toy tick, than to the toy in toiling on and on, and, as for me, I have a desire for the society of the host of the dead, and for the manners and customs of that other coast. . . . There goes dressing-bell, I suppose I must drag myself and go: it is after six o'clock, the dark-grey hour of Moghreb on

the very brink of night, and outside the case-ment there I can see drizzle-rack drifting south like a funeral-train before the Autumn blasts in a mood as drab as bablah, moving like a crowd of ghosts all cowled, all towering tall as ghosts of the old gods, bearing to the grave one of their barons who has drained to the dregs the grail of the second death. Of that very grapewort and wormwood is my mind and purpose. . . ”

XIV

SHAN DEEP IN IT

ALL Glanncourt, all Gloucestershire, was asleep, except perhaps a watcher on his beat, some fox, or poaching hound, or prowling house-cat in a cover, a screech-owl in the cedar, and Anne Hine, with a sheep's bone by her side, musing over her sketch-book in a book-room; far in the south-west the half-moon like an eye half shut was drowsing droopingly down in a couch of clouds, no more heeding that her beauty was all unmarked than when during eras of years, before men began to breathe and kiss out their fingers at her, she had made her couch in beauty: and the night sighed: or rather the morning, for it was three o'clock.

All at once, Anne, seated on her hearth-rug, seemed to hear a ghost, a life in the night, for her ears like all her senses were as sharp as light, and she started and rose to her feet, going very white.

There was a creak somewhere in the scheme of things, something sneaking uneasily through the

kingdom of sleep, and as she now stood hearken-
ing with both her ears near the door, she was
aware of the bump of a foot, soft-sounding in the
carpet of the stair, and at once decided within
herself that it was made by a foot without any
boot on.

She quickly took off her slippers, crept quite
quietly to the electric light and turned it off,
then, opening the room-door, out like a mouse
she moved.

When she had made her way to the bottom of
the stairs, she could see nothing: it was dark
about there: but as, with her heart in her mouth,
she waited, there was a sound like the vibration
of something shaken, and gathering that the
sneak had butted against the Shakespeare statue
up there above, up she moved, stooped low down
on hands and knees, as privily prowling as the
cheetah's paw, more secretly creeping than the
sneak.

On the left side of the corridor above was a
room which was called "the Boudoir," but was
rather an office, for there Mrs. Gordridge did
much of her governing, and kept many papers;
and as just there a beam of moonlight that had
passed through the cedar dappled the carpet
with a pattern of leaves, Anne was able to see a

foot in a sock lifted to pass into "the Boudoir" . . . "I knew at once in my heart who it was," she wrote of it: "and I had known before."

Now for three minutes she half-lay, half knelt, at the stair-head, staring, hearkening at her heart which stormed within her chest, thinking it out. Then she moved: crept past the boudoir, up another stair, her speed increasing every moment till in the remoter regions of the mansion her heels were fleeting fast, and passing into a small room, she stooped at a bedside to breathe into an ear: "Nancy, wake up, but don't say a syllable. . . ."

"There's a man in the house," she added, "and you are to come with me, but are not to meddle with him at all, nor utter one word. . . ."

Nancy, a still-room maid, got up. Anne did not give her the time to slip on a petticoat, and the pair of girls spurted out together, going hand-in-hand, till they were on the stairs, when they stole in detail down to the boudoir-door. Just here stood a pedestal and a large divan among some palms, and by kneeling on the divan the two, peeping, could see between the pedestal and the door-post into the boudoir, which was dark, but not all dark, because of a diffusion of moonlight through the blinds into

the room: and with bated breath they knelt there, staring.

Anne put her lips nearly into the ear of Nancy, instigating into the organs of her brain, rather than breathing, the thought: "Can you see?"

Nancy put her lips into Anne's ear, answering: "No."

Anne put her lips into Nancy's ear, dealing to her the meaning: "Can you hear?"

Nancy put her lips into Anne's ear, answering: "*Yes.*"

It was a scratching of which they were aware, going on as patiently low as a rat's gnawing, though again and again there was a moment of impatience, a raising of the rate of the fumbling, or filing, or prising, that was being done, and suddenly something snapped and popped with a sound so outrageously rousing, that the house seemed conscious of it throughout the realm of its sleep, and the two peepers shivered at it; after which there was a silence which lasted and waited not less than five minutes, in which the night itself seemed to wait and stare, till a match was struck within the boudoir, and Anne made room for Nancy to see.

"Did you see?"

“ His back.”

“ Come.”

The two moved off.

“ Oh, Miss Hine, it is too *awful*,” chattered Nancy’s jaws at her door.

“ You try and fall asleep,” panted Anne in answer, “ and don’t breathe a syllable to a soul, until you are asked.”

And not one word was heard of the matter till after eleven the next morning, when there occurred an outcry from Mrs. Gordridge, who, four days before this, had drawn two hundred pounds out of the bank, of which she now found forty pounds vanished, and both a drawer of her cabinet and her cash-box broken open.

Anne, on being summoned, stood by the boudoir-window, smiling with an under-look at a death-mask of the late master of Glanncourt, and made the remark: “ He’s an honest old thief, since he has left a great deal more than half.”

“ You take it coolly! ” said Mrs. Gordridge: “ this is the first time that I have ever been subjected to such a barefaced outrage . . . telegraph instantly—”

“ Ah, Aunt, better let the matter drop,” murmured Anne.

Mrs. Gordridge let her two arms fall, contemplating Anne with reproach, saying: "Well, if this isn't a fantastic young woman!"

"I happen to have a meaning," answered Anne: "I happen to know all about the theft, I was awake, I saw it done—"

"And you said not one—"

"Aunt, it would only have grieved you."

"Who was it?"

"Aunt, it will only grieve you—"

"Tell me this very moment."

"Well, if you insist upon knowing, ask Nancy, who saw it all with me: I'd really rather not tell it myself, Aunt"—whereat Anne ran out, leaving Mrs. Gordridge agape after her, and in a few minutes Nancy stood in the boudoir, rendering up the secret that the night had carried in it.

"So who was the man?" asked Mrs. Gordridge.

Nancy hesitated, looking down at her nails, and said in a low tone: "Mr. O'Shannon, mum."

"Shan O'Shannon?"

"Yes'm."

Mrs. Gordridge's eyes dwelt on the girl, her fingers touching her brow, and she gazed out of window at boughs bare now of all their foliage.

"But are you sure?" she asked.

“ Yes'm, I think so,” said Nancy.

“ Saw his face, did you?”

“ No, mum, I didn't see his face, but I saw his back.”

“ And you are quite sure?”

“ Yes'm, I think so.”

“ Don't mention it to anyone:—mind you, see that you don't. Tell Miss Hine to come ”—and Anne, having come, heard by the window the winds yearning through the yewen and oaken thickness of the west shrubbery close by, and discussed the tragedy a long while.

“ So what in God's name am I to do with this young man?” Mrs. Gordridge wished to know.

“ I wish I could suggest something, Aunt,” was Anne's answer.

“ But are you quite absolutely sure that it was the young man?” Mrs. Gordridge asked pettishly.

“ I can only say that I saw him, Aunt.”

“ But I should as soon have thought Arthur capable—it is merely incredible! ”

“ It is, really, Aunt—though true.”

“ Then, it is *your* fault—”

“ Oh, it is *sure* to be, Aunt.”

“ Yes, it is, for why didn't you give me to know long ago that the man was probably turn-

ing the birds into money?—not spring everything upon me in this fashion? *I* had no notion that he was in money straits! but you, by your own shewing, had, and kept it dark in your dark way. . . . How is it possible that he should be in straits? And if he was, why did he not come to me and say so, since he knows that I give freely?”

Anne looked out of window without answer, and the old lady added: “ But don’t you see any way out of this sudden bad dream? My duty, of course, is in the direction of the police—”

“ Ah! ” sighed Anne, with irony.

“ So what is the ‘ Ah ’ about?”

“ He will be taken to prison and to judgment, Aunt,” answered Anne, with a certain fervour of closed eyes.

“ But why the quotation? . . . I’ll take my oath that sometimes lately your observations give one the impression of a girl quite off her nut and gallivanting in Cocagne! I say that my clear duty is to hand the young man over to the police—Where does the quotation come in? And I’m sure that I should do it ruthlessly, too, only I am so truly sorry for him, so truly, and the young man once declared to me that he loves the name of Gordridge—”

“ He does, Aunt, I am convinced.”

“ So what is one to do in such a case?” asked Mrs. Gordridge.

“ I suppose you will have to turn him away,” murmured Anne, gazing out at the bare boughs.

“ That without saying. If the young man is a felon how is one to have him about the place?”

“ And as to Rosie?”

“ What can Rosie do, except remain with me? I am responsible for her bit of a life, I can't have her exposed—”

“ No, of course,” muttered Anne.

And this was the sense of what was said to Shan that same gloaming when he sat by the boudoir-window before Mrs. Gordridge, looking most gaunt, while Anne Hine all white, hearkened outside the door, Mrs. Gordridge first asking him if he had heard that some money had been stolen, and when Shan said no, he hadn't heard, she shewed him the wrenched cash-box and cabinet-drawer, at both of which Shan looked with no little interest, asking: “ And what steps do you intend to take about it, mum?”

Then, with dwelling glances at his face where he sat, Mrs. Gordridge told him that she was

not wholly in the dark as to who the culprit was, and, having a great regard for the culprit, she did not, though it was her duty, mean to prosecute, believing as she did that this step into which the culprit had been betrayed by some money-strait would never be repeated. But what she had to say to Shan was this: that she had lately determined that she had no further need for his services, so he must straightway make preparations to leave the estate.

“I see, mum,” said Shan, and Mrs. Gordridge groaned for him, for he was groping all about the ground for his cap, but could not find it, though it was quite near his feet.

“I need not say,” remarked Mrs. Gordridge, “that Rosie remains with me—for some time at any rate.”

“I see, mum.”

“That is all, I think, that I had to say to you for the present, O’Shannon.”

“I see, mum. . . . Strange to say, I, too, have lost some money—forty pounds, too, the same as you—that’s funny.”

Mrs. Gordridge, hardly believing this, made no answer, waiting for him to go; but he sat there where he was.

Suddenly he started, asking: “What is your

reason for treating me in this way? Have you any reason to imagine that it was *I*—?”

“ Ah, I don't want to answer any questions, O'Shannon.”

“ Then, that *is* it,” he said in a groan: “ I've got no luck at all.”

Still Mrs. Gordridge waited for him to go, but there he sat bowed down over his cap, which he had now found, gazing at the maker's name in it: he looked very sad: and after a time he remarked again, moaning so very low to himself that not half his words were heard: “ I seem to have no luck . . . to be looked upon as a leper . . . to be cast out as one . . . without having one heart to guess at one, and be friends with one, a stranger in life, like a ghost going about in the crowd at a fair, lonely and out of it. There's Rosie who regards me as a fool, so I suppose I must be one, and there are those who regard me as a rogue, so I suppose I must be one. . . . I wish I never had been born, and I wish I was one of those dead men who were buried ages ago, and nothing of them but their bones any longer remain in their graves, then I should be dead and at rest, and my grave would know me well. To lose all my life, and upon that my good name, too . . . to be looked upon as a thief . . . I appeal

to God, if there's a God. Some of them are spreading it about now that there's no God, but that's all my eye, I know, because there's an eye in the breast that knows Him, and upbraids Him, aye, and He can hear when I speak, though I can't catch what answer He is giving, and I only wish er was a man, a King in London, so that I could go by rail in a train to Him, and spread out my case before Him face to face, and—but now, may be, I'm talking—" whereupon Mrs. Gordridge, who had caught some few of his words, stooped forward, wooing to him: "Never mind, O'Shannon, be brave, and you will out-live it all yet—"

"Mrs. Gordridge," answered Shan, with eyes peering pig-tiny and red toward tears where tears were desert-dry, "you can't feel with the grief of a man who's like a man doomed to work at some burden in a world all by himself, but you are good to me, and I forgive you from my heart."

"Well, it is *he* who forgives *me* now," thought Mrs. Gordridge, stooped sideways to pull a dog's hair, and without looking up she added with some shyness: "I do feel with you. . . . Why are you like a man working in a world—?"

"It doesn't matter, mum," said he in a mood

as drooping as Gethsemane, "since life is soon over, and then the grass grows green over every grief. . . . All I beg you, for God's sake, Mrs. Gordridge, is not to take her from me—"

"Rosie? But I'm afraid—"

"But, Mrs. Gordridge—"

"No, not that, O'Shannon—"

"Oh, but not now, it would kill me dead now, when I am losing everything else, driven out, to lose her, too—I know I am selfish, but, Mrs. Gordridge, for God's sake, now—husband and wife—"

He had stood up to plead, but those lips of Mrs. Gordridge, going harder with opposition, said: "I have already decided, O'Shannon; I have said that I grieve for you, but I do not feel at all like making any money-provision for you at present, and you are going out to hardships to which that young girl is not inured, so it is useless—" at which word "useless" Shan suddenly threw up hands and eyes, making his escape from the room, whereupon Anne Hine, who had been listening outside, hid on the divan behind the pedestal, till he was half down the stairs, when she hastened out after him to ask if it was true that he was going away, and when was he going.

"At the first moment that I can, Miss Hine," he answered: "within the week—"

“So soon?” Her gaze hung languishing on his face. “But you won’t be too, too forlorn, will you? for it will all be well—And don’t forget that before you go you will be giving me the sitting for your head that I begged you for—”

He stared, her prayer at the moment seemed so frivolously unrelated to that reel of his sorrows, and a memory arose, too, somewhere in his brain that he was forbidden by Rosie to have any friendship with Anne; but, as there was no saying no to such a wish, he gave her an absent-minded “very good, then,” and was gone.

Down at the cottage, Rosie in more than half undress, her head all little horns in curling-pins, was lounging before a fire when he entered and without saying anything threw himself down on a couch, where he lay with his brow on his arms; she, too, without saying aught, continuing to look at her book.

Presently he smiled, and remarked: “Rosie, you smoke too much lately.”

“Don’t let that interest you,” she retorted, “you know I always decline to be dictated to.”

“Surely you are not cross because I say that?”

“Not a bit. Why does it occur to you that I am cross?”

“It seemed so a bit.”

“ But, then, you never understand me, as you know. ”

“ Don't I? So deep, and dark, and hard to understand, aren't you? ”

This tender sarcasm had no less power to cause Rosie to sit up than a pin-prick, and she remarked to her spouse: “ So do you imagine that you know me? There isn't a soul that does! I am such an actress—I love to pose as a pretty, shallow, little pet, but how about my real, deep, complex self? I'm so *fearfully* complex, that, if you could know me so thoroughly as I know you—”

“ Do you know me thoroughly? ”

“ Thoroughly! ”

“ Sure, now? Positive? Sometimes you say just the opposite. But if you do know me, throw an eye on me now, and tell me—am I happy, Rosie? or is my soul sad? ”

“ You look a little curious—is anything wrong? ”

“ Rosie, you won't be able to be smoking so much soon. ”

“ What do you mean? ”

“ You won't be having your own way in everything as in your own home: you are going to live up at the Hall. ”

“ Hip! But what is it all about?”

“ Well, I have just been turned out of Glann-court.”

“ Turned—How do you mean?”

“ Turned away, just as any other servant of the estate might be.”

“ You are joking.”

“ No, I’m not joking. . . . I will put it before you, Rosie: Last night forty pounds were burglaried out of Mrs. Gordridge’s house-service cash-box, and she has some reason—I don’t know what—I can’t dream what—for believing that it was I—”

“ Who—?”

“ Yes, stole it.”

Rosie gaped at him, going pale round the nose.

“ *You?*”

“ So she thinks.”

“ She said so?”

“ As good as.”

Rosie looked as if she saw a ghost, and presently bending over her book again, she read without understanding what she was reading, and the cigarette went out between her fingers.

Then when the stillness had long lasted, Shan said: “ Rosie, don’t you ever believe such a thing of me.”

“ Oh, indeed! ” said Rosie, throwing an eye round at him.

“ Rosie, I say that because I know that you know that I am hard up, and because Mrs. Gordridge would hardly have charged me without having some sort of grounds—”

“ She wouldn’t have said it to *me*, though,” thought Rosie with a hard lip over her book.

“ Well, that is how it stands,” murmured Shan: “ I am turned out of Glanncourt, and you will be going to the Hall, so that’s why I say that you won’t be smoking quite so much, and being your own mistress, as when you are with me in your own home, Rosie.”

Keenly he expected her reply now, but Rosie only shrugged her shoulder, and went on reading, without grasping any of the sense of her book; and presently got up to go to dress for a dance.

And she had just got through a waltz about midnight when Mrs. Gordridge came up to her to take her out into the book-room, for though Rosie had dined at the Hall, no chance till now had been found for a talk, and there, sitting by her mama’s chair, the situation of things was detailed to her.

But, owing to Rosie’s attitude, the interview

was soon over, for "It's all a lie, Mama Gordridge," she said.

"No, my poor dear, listen—" began Mrs. Gordridge.

"No, it's all a lie," said Rosie with a blind shake of the head.

"Rosie! But haven't I told you—?"

"Who are these two people who say that they saw him?"

"I have told you, Rosie, that I do not desire to say, for—"

"Then, don't believe them, they had some motive—"

"But, Rosie, do you want to displease me? If *I* am convinced, isn't that enough for *you*? There is no doubt, my poor dear, it is perfectly certain, so there is no way out, he will have to leave, and you must come back to your mama."

Rosie, gracefully bent over the grate, with the mounds and curves of an hour-glass now, no longer of a girl, had a pouted mouth, thinking within herself: "She forgets that I'm not a child any more, but a married woman," and when Mrs. Gordridge added: "You had better leave him to make his own arrangements, and come up at once," Rosie said: "No, Mama Gordridge, I can't do that."

"Can't do what?" Mrs. Gordridge wished to know.

"He is my husband, after all," muttered the white wife in a stubborn way.

"Dear me. So what then? Who made him your husband?"

"You did."

"Well, and I take you from him when he no longer deserves you."

"It is all a lie, Mama Gordridge."

"Nonsense! Don't say that again. Just do as I tell you."

"I couldn't, Mama Gordridge, nor wouldn't."

"But explain yourself! wouldn't *what?*"

"If he goes, I go with him."

"Oh, you go with him. . . ."

"I should have to."

Mrs. Gordridge's eyes mused upon the mutineer, so long securely her own, due to her by so many years of pettings, and a pang of jealousy and that tooth with which ingratitude grubs so bruised the old woman's bosom, that after half a minute she deigned to say to Rosie: "Which seems to mean that you choose him rather than me. . . ."

"Isn't he my husband?" muttered Rosie.

And now the talk ended.

“Go,” said Mrs. Gordridge, calmly, though her stick lifted, “get out of my sight . . . make haste . . .” and, all inflamed of face went the white wife, venting with venom the breath “*selfish!*” and as she threw on her wrap in the vestibule, she vented with venom the breath “*selfish!*” and as she went away down the vale she vented the breath “*selfish!*” vexed with her mama, and so till she came down to the cottage, where Shan, letting her in, heard her vent some word under her breath.

“What’s the matter?” he asked in their parlour where he had kept a nice fire for her, “you are home sooner—”

“*Selfish!*” went Rosie.

“Who is?”

“She is only tired of Anne, and it is only for herself that she wants me back—”

“Who? Has she said—?”

“*Selfish!* If she thinks that I’m still a child—I’d sooner live with you in a sty—”

“With me?”—a brightness of surprise sprouting like day-spring on his brow—“do you say that you will be coming with me?”

“Aren’t you my husband?”

His eyes sprang water.

“Oh, you, you,” he cried to her, “so cross, so

cruel at times, but when one is in bitter trouble—" his throat choked, but on his knees he washed her hands with his tears, while she slapped him on the side of the head, smiling down upon him, expecting him now to stand up and kiss her. . . .

XV

SHAN NIGHT-WALKS

THE next afternoon at the hour fixed Shan marched down from the hills to the Hall to have his head drawn, sighting, as he drew nigh the house, the last trunk of the guests going off, and at the front door stood some moments, giving ear to the organ bleating bleak concords from the inner hall—Anne Hine rendering Mozart's "Requiem." She came quickly to meet and lead him into the billiard-room, which was an out-room at the side of the house-front where the light was fair, and where a square of paper, pinned on a piece of deal, waited on her easel.

There Anne, taking crayon in hand, sat and began; but it was not well: she got up to him again, her two palms suggesting his head to a juster angle, a touch at which to his heart he shuddered, it had such a churchyard chill; and she sat anew to draw his head, but still it was not well, it was very far beyond her, her hand was pallid, her voice was pallid, her eyelids pallid, her lips, her gums, her heart, that like a pallid horse galloped.

Shan wondered within himself why she wore white clothes on so cold a day, all pure white and not too warm-looking—with flurries of early snow fluttering every few minutes in the air; and why on earth he wondered was there that old grey bone of some beast lying in a grave of white orchids on a corner of the billiard-table, all as neat as might be. . . .

They were talking about his going from Glanncourt, and she said to him: “You suffer, and you seem to yourself a man doomed to work at some burden in a world where there burns neither sun nor moon, where there breathes no other being but yourself; but that is not wholly true, for there is one who knows you—how you start at it! but it is true, and don’t be afraid that I shall betray you, since I have known so long—”

“What have you known?” he asked sharply.

“This,” she said, “that you are one of the best of men.”

“Well, now!” he went, astounded.

“Greater than most of the greatest heroes of history.”

“Well, now!” he went again, his gaze suddenly affronted with a prickle of tears.

“All that you have undertaken and have undergone,” said she, and she flushed from the

ghost of lily to the ghost of rose, “ the weight of it, and the twelve labours of it, your inane days, and your days of storm, doubts in your heart’s heart about the being of God, and about the meaning of things, and the grave, sudden rebellions of your rabble against the no from the throne, your great passion, and your great patience, all your loneliness and famine for sympathy, all this and a lot more I have divined and known of you—”

“ O! ”—he covered his eyes, moaning, some nerve in his breast wrung with strong passion by this balm after all his journeying and sore feet, feeling that here at least was one, that of a host who ignored yet one at least, did recognise and prize his soul, and with molten eyes he moaned, thinking that twice now within two days had tears of ease been twisted out of the iron of those eyes of his, last night by Rosie’s faithfulness, and now by Anne, and the wilderness was not without its rare oasis after all, here or there a coolness of greenery and sluice of water, that a man may thank God, and take heart.

Anne moved her chair to his to say with an agitation that was painful: “ And I have loved all that, and loved you for it, as I love the moon, and sunsets, and storms—”

“Miss Hine, you are good—” he began to say, and then he had a start! “but—but I trust you, Miss Hine, you won’t breathe one syllable—”

“Oh, but haven’t I known from the first—?”

“What have you?”

“That you are keeping her for Arthur—”

Again he started, glancing in alarm at the door!

“There’s no one about,” she said, “everything henceforth is quite safe for you: Rosie will be here, for, of course, a girl like her will not follow you into poverty and exile—I am not judging by my wishes—she won’t—and she will be here till Arthur comes, for Aunt, believing that she is your wife as other wives are, will have no fear that Arthur would marry a keeper’s widow, so will keep her here, then Rosie will tell Arthur of her whiteness, and he will marry her: so that you can die now quite assured that all is safe—” she spoke gallopingly, panting now faster and faster—“You have no motive to live a day longer, and *I* am going with you—do you know?—giving my heart on the same altar—if you will have me—”

Once again Shan shuddered at her, struck by the impression that he was seated by some dream-creature more sprite than girl, more of

Hades and the grave than of this earth, and with shy eyelids he muttered: "Really, Miss Hine. . ."

She did not hear, and clutching his sleeve, speaking in a whisper that eagerly galloped, she said: "Shall it be so? I propose that we leave for London—when you will—to-night—be married by special licence—you will indulge me in this, for though I see the mummery of it, for months my mind has been given to it—then, once married, we go back to the bed, and do it. . . ."

"Miss—! do what?"

"Take the poison. . . ."

Shan stood sharply up, and she, remarking now the look of alarm that widened his eyes, asked: "Why are you horrified? Do you think me too young, and too happy, to die? I am not happy—oh no. Listen, I will tell *you*: my life has been one long hunger, for I am not a girl like others who love and are beloved, since I can love nothing, except love, nor has anyone loved me. Even my love of beauty and of you, though it is something intense, is not really love, I think, but a thing all light and no heat, a love in my eyes, which are like eyes washed with eye-bright to see and love; but the love gets no further than my eyes, for as if the telegraphic nerves between

my eyes and my heart had broken down, though my heart is dimly conscious when love is going on up in my eyes, and lifts and spurs and urges itself to love, too, it can't, the connections being all cut, and falls back sick. And this is bitter, for I am Tantalus standing by the water of life that all slips through my fingers when they go to bring it to my lips. . . . May be on the other brink of the rivulet there is a ewer. . . ."

He could only gaze at her with the gravest eyes of sorrow, the young lady all in her white garb looking to him quite "*fey*," abandoned to all the death-dances and fantasticalities of the land of banshees and bode-bats and kobolds in which she was bewitched, and when she said to him: "Do not censure yourself for my death, for you cannot help, you are just a ship plunging into a maelstrom, and taking a wherry in her wake," he replied with some resentment: "Really, Miss Hine, all this does not seem very serious talk on your part"—at which word "*serious*," Anne turned up to him a yet pastier face, whispering: "Do you mean that you won't have me with you? Or do you mean that you won't do it at once?"

"It what, Miss Hine? Kill myself? Fantastic idea to have in your mind!"

“Why—‘fantastic’?”—with an effort to swallow—“since you *do* mean, some time, to do it.”

“I never in my life had such a thought,” declared Shan, “I have always looked upon it as a wicked and mad thing for a man to go and do.”

“Mad”—her eyes fixed on his face—her castle all collapsed—“*mad!*”—after which she walked two steps to the billiard-table, and laid her face down sideways on the little mound of flowers there and the brown rib in it, while he with eyes that swam in a passion of pity stepped to her, saying: “Dear Miss Hine,” and touched her hand an instant: but at the same time from the dining-room near there reached his ear the coming of a stick which meant Mrs. Gordridge, and he felt an instinct to be away which was quickened when Anne, glancing round at him, murmured: “Yes, go,” upon which he passed away out through the outer door.

All that evening his mind was full of fear for her, all that night he could not sleep; nor, somehow, could Rosie; and they sat into the morning hours in a state of awe for which they could little account over a fire in a room without any carpet now, their things all strewn into confusion round them, for their moving; and once

when the white wife about one o'clock went out to find some wine, she flew back with wild eyes, all blanched, and, clinging to Shan's arm, declared that she was aware of something walking in the kitchen. . . .

"It must be the wind," said he—for quite a hurricane was raging—"make an effort not to be too frightened, now."

"I can't help it," Rosie replied, "I feel cold all over—O, it is ominous, Shan, that strick-owl screeching out there hour after hour in the beech-tree, for as sure as ever you hear it, so sure there's a burial."

"Lieutenant Gordridge may be killed. . . ."

"God knows. . . . Yes, that *is* it, you may be sure."

"No, that isn't it, for the strick's never a certainty, and you were nervous before."

"That's true, I was feeling queer all the evening. . . . I wonder if it was what I saw Anne do that upset me."

"What was that?"

"It gave me quite a queer feel—I am certain that that girl can't be all there. This evening—I was waiting for you in the shed near the farm-hedge, when I saw her all in white on the other side, though she didn't see me. She had seen Cook

Basset and Martha bearing between them a tray with a great forty-pounds piece of beef to bury—Lucille always says that what's wasted at Glanncourt would keep two French families going—and she had followed and watched the burying of it; then, when the other two were gone, what do you think she did? Set to shaping and arranging the grave with her hands, then put grass and sprigs on it, smiling to herself. . . .”

At this Shan, who was already rather wannish, went wanner, leaning over the fire; even the dog, with its weird sympathies, whined; while the white wife, seated on the rug against Shan's leg gazed with grave eyes into the grate.

“ So finish telling me,” she said presently.

“ It will only upset you more, Rosie.”

“ No, let's have it.”

“ I didn't see it myself,” he said, “ it was my father—when I was nine and a half years old it was, and I'm never likely to forget that night. You know, Rosie, the story of Miss Grover, how she got on a vicious horse one day against the advice of her father, saying that she would ride it to hell, how it threw her against that stake-gate up there on the Chase, and how they say that her ghost walks there, though *I* know of no one that ever saw it—only my father that

night. He and a man named Joe Higgins had gone to Tintern to get paid for some work, and walked back together on just such a moonlight morning as this with a storm of wind blowing. Well, mother had made me sit up for father in the kitchen, and soon after two in he walks to me. . . . I'd almost rather have seen the ghost itself! for though it was two miles from the stake-gate where it had stared at him to our house, I could still see his hairs sticking out stiff about his head—actually *see* them—”

“ Oh, good God. . . .”

“ Aye, I shall ever remember that night.”

“ Shan,” whispered Rosie, “ have you ever seen anything yourself?”

“ No, nothing: I can't honestly say that I have ever seen anything. But my father, he was pretty eerie, he'd see things. One Sunday midnight, going home from courting my mother, he saw a tall man in a frock-coat with snow-white gloves behind him, so, as it was a very lonely road, he thought he would stop for the man, but every time he stopped, so the man stopped, too, and at last when father's cocoa-nut began to grow, he scattered and ran, but, as he madly ran, so the man ran after—”

“ Good Lord, Shan. . . .”

“Such things are. . . . Did you ever know a man called Pendix Ball?”

“No.”

“They call him Pendix because he had appendicitis. . . . Never heard his name?”

“Yes, I have heard his name.”

“Well, when you were a child of—let me see—seven and three months, this Pendix Ball saw something one night—nobody knows what—nobody could ever discover what: but the next day he left Woodston—cleared clean away—and swears that to be King of England he would not range within fifteen leagues of this place again so long as oak and ash do grow.”

“What could he—? Oh, God, Shan, what’s that?” Now with a milk-white face twisted round in affright the white wife sprang straight to clasp her spouse, for at a casement of the room there had sounded a rapping.

“Wait here, and I will go,” he whispered: “Don’t you fear—you wait, and I will go.”

All his nerves thought it a ghost, but it turned out to be only a ghost-countenanced man, named Price, a keeper, who came to give into Shan’s ear the tidings that he had just seen a ghost, or something extremely like a ghost, something in a night-dress with long-flowing

hair, that left footprints of naked feet in the snow, something fleet, seeing that Price had chased it a good mile up toward the Chase, but could not catch it . . . something which the dogs would not bite. . . .

“ Stop, I’ll come,” said Shan, and within ten minutes, having got Rosie to go to bed with old Pruie, throwing on an ulster and flap-cap, he set off with Price, the wind slamming the door behind him, for it was, in truth a wild and white night, snow on the ground, the moon full somewhere in the sky, though for clouds no trace of her could be anywhere seen, and all in between ground and clouds storm-winds wheeling, all the night showing quite lethal whitish, like the visage of a negro grey in death; and on for four miles, up mountain-paths, then down along a road, the two men tracked the footprints, till, by a bit of wall on the edge of a quarry-cliff, from Shan’s heart leapt the breath: “There she is. . . !”

Ninety feet below flowed the Wye, winding between cliffs of forest and mud-banks: all cliff and forest on that farther side, but on this quarry-side where they stood a droop of the cliffs higher up revealed a wide scene of valley, and five hundred yards away up yonder on the

river-slime and its dark seaweed-twine was seen a white speck in the white night. . . .

“That wouldn’t be she,” breathed Price peering, “that’s one of the swans—”

Shan peered deeply afresh, and suddenly crying, “*It’s a woman!*” flew.

For the tide was fast rising, had already half-filled the river, and they had a *détour* to make—up the road anew, then to the left along a park-wall, a spray of snow spraying their faces, then through a gate, down a lot of broken ground, through an enclosure of brown bracken surrounding the ruins of a church, and now a run through rushes to the river’s brink: and there, in truth, they found brooding high up on the bank—a swan: hissing serpent forward, bird astern: musing there in solitude by the Wye upon the moonlight and upon all the wild mood of the night, warbling swan-music in her heart: but beside her—nothing.

The two men stood and watched her: and still Shan maintained his belief that what he had seen from the reef-edge was no swan, but a woman seated there. . . .

They now by a two hours’ trudge got back to Glanncourt, and Shan, as day broke, crept up to his bed: but only within four hours to be roused

out of slumber by Rosie, the white wife with eyes of wildness recounting with sobs on his breast how that Anne Hine had been found drowned down by the Wye-mouth with the out-fallen tide, and had now been brought mortal to the Hall.

Shan uttered not a word, but all in a shiver and flurry from head to foot threw on his things, and sallied headlong out of the house, he hardly knew why, with a casting up to heaven of his eyes accusingly. . . . As to his interview with Anne the previous afternoon he had so far told Rosie nothing.

XVI

SHAN DECAMPS

DURING the afternoon after the inquest Mr. Orrock, with crape on his arm, walked down to the gamekeeper's house with a grave face, meeting there men who were bearing away furniture on their backs, to have in the drawing-room an interview with the white wife, white by nature, quite black that day by costume.

"I can still offer you a chair, Mr. Orrock," she said with a smile, as she shook hands, and he with a sad smile answered: "Ah, this is not well, my dear . . . London this breezy day is all one gala of flags to greet Lord Roberts' return, but for us here the pomps of death, and hearts that are asmart with partings. Has Dr. Blood called? No? Then, I am before him, for that he purposes coming I am confirmed."

"About anything special, Mr. Orrock?"

"Yes: Rosie, my child, you must go straight-way up to your Mama Gordridge."

"Has she sent you—?"

"No, I can't say that: but she expects you to go up and make your submission."

Rosie, who stood leaning on both her arms over a chair-back, answered deliberately: "Mr. Orrock, I am a married woman, I am no longer a child, and I shall go to the Hall when I am sent for, not before, nor have I any submission to make to anyone, for, as I dare say you have been told, my husband has been accused of a shameful act, so it is I who expect an apology from other people."

"I see your point of view," said Mr. Orrock; "but, then, consider: you are young and she—older."

"I am a married woman," muttered the white wife wilfully.

"Quite so—a young, a charmingly young, married woman; but remember, Rosie, that your Mama Gordridge is at present plunged into such a gloom of mind that it is only her strength of character, I am confirmed, which keeps her from a nervous crisis: she needs your companionship, she needs your care—you seem to forget that."

Rosie prettily shook a low-bowed head, answering: "No, I don't forget, and I am truly, truly sorry for her, but she must not make statements and then stubbornly stick to them, for that is her manner, to think herself infallible,

and to treat everybody like children, so she must be taught now: if she really wants me, let her send for me, and *not* be stubborn."

"Rosie, I could never have believed that you would prove so recusant."

"Oh, I have a most complex character, Mr. Orrock," said the white wife; "no one quite knows me."

Mr. Orrock, smiling fondly at her, said: "What you *have*, beyond question, my dear, is a marvellous store of health—such a garden of roses grows in those cheeks, Rosie!" at which Rosie's nose secretly twitched disdain at him, compliments of her roses being so stale to her, whereas if he had but complimented her "complexity of character," as to which she was less certain, she would have worshipped her clergyman. . . . "I don't know," he added, "if it is your habit to take camomile at this season of the year? Ah, you don't, no, well. . . . But to return—Rosie, this is most grave: can it be that you know so little of your Mama Gordridge as to be waiting for her to take the first step?"

Rosie shrugged without answering, inwardly angered now with him for ignoring her complexity.

"But you don't mean to go away without

first going to her?" he asked: "Ah, no, you could never be so blind to your own interests, my dear."

"She can speak to me at the funeral," answered Rosie: "otherwise I shall go."

"But, Rosie, she never forgives—I tell you so—she *never* forgives! you had better be careful. . . . The wonder is that your husband himself does not insist—"

"He *has* told me to go, Mr. Orrock, but one doesn't do everything that one's husband tells one: besides, he is too cut up now to think of me or anything else, it seems—one would imagine that it was his lover who was dead, his lover and his wife, and his mother, and his father all in one—hasn't tasted even a cup of tea ever since."

"Indeed? Well, that may be somewhat excessive, but, then, over all the country-side this too awful thing has cast its pall; for us all the very atmosphere seems vibrative with a remembrance and echo of the bell that has tolled, and the ear at every moment expects a knell. Oh, Rosie, this is sad . . . in four days' time she would have been twenty-five. She was not popular in her life, since there was something too aberrant, too unique and solitary in her being, and she knew very much too much of the minuter move-

ments of her neighbours' bosoms to be bearable in society: but her sarcasm was hardly ever cruel, only tart, frequently kindly, as light is, and now I hear that many of the poor people here are saying that she was generosity and sympathy itself in her sly way: and now she lies drowned. . . . Well, good-bye, and if Dr. Blood comes, just tell him that he is an age too late, that the whole ground has been gone over, and he needn't waste his precious breath," upon which the clergyman took his departure for the Hall, where Mrs. Gordridge, having that day for the first time gazed upon the features of the dead, had indeed need of her friends.

Dr. Blood, for his share, bent upon the same end as Mr. Orrock, came not to Rosie, but made for Shan, and gleaning in those back regions of Glanncourt that Shan had taken train that day, he placed at the station to await Shan's appearance a lad who, as the shades of evening deepened, led Shan to the doctor's place, where the doctor impressed upon Shan that it was his duty to induce the mutineer to speed immediately to her mama; to which Shan made answer: "It shall be done, Dr. Blood."

"What is the matter?" the doctor then said; "you look downright bad."

"It is nothing, Dr. Blood," answered Shan, the muscles of his countenance all sternly drawn, "but I have to ask you, sir, since I do not wish to apply to Mrs. Gordridge, if you will procure me a sight of the body."

"Certainly," answered the doctor, "I am now going up to Glanncourt, if you like to come."

Soon, therefore, Shan was standing in the state-bedroom of Glanncourt, that one over against the cedar, whose near branches darkened its largeness. The evening was dreary in there, the sun having set, and desolate, for the flunkey who had led him up had not come in, nor did the two candles that towered by the bedside throw out their radiance much farther than the aureole round their own flame, or than the coffin covered by a sheet-drapery on the bed between them, and the chamber's air reeked of eternity. But full of awe as was that place, no fear was there for Shan, since perfect pity casts out fear, and he uncovered her, putting the wedding-ring which he had purchased with two of his precious pounds that day inside her shroud by her hand—for she had wished to espouse herself to him, and here was all he could do now to please her—and he pushed, too, a bunch of snow-of-the-mountain beneath her

shroud, and in the space between the two curves of her hair brushed downward he kissed her large brow with a sound of heart-break and of a hound's yowling, and after gazing upon her face, upon her poor lids glued down a little in a mood of musing, and upon the pouted mouth of her drowning, his countenance worked, and dropping down there by the bedside, he prayed without any words.

And the following gloaming, holding his umbrella over Rosie, he followed the procession of broughams to the grave, heard the tolls prating of eternity, heard Mr. Orrock's funeral-words falter in his throat, for all was as usual in the burying, since the jury, though conscious somewhere within them that Britons never shall be slaves, had not dared to bring any other verdict upon a lady than that of "found drowned"; and now when the earth had covered her, and the last words of parting were uttered, and they all turned away from her, Shan, going up the lane to Glanncourt, handed Rosie her parasol, for the mist was frizzy with drizzle-spray, saying to her: "Now, Rosie, you are to go to Mrs. Gordridge, and if she wants you to stay with her, you stay, and I'll go my way alone."

Rosie muttered something stubborn to herself, but went, and before long was kissing her mama's cheek, though in the very act she felt that it was a kiss through a wall between, hard now to break down. Mrs. Gordridge, seated by the French window of her cosy corner, gazed forth in silence at the gadding haze, lonely of soul, sore at the way of life and the moan of death, but still cold of eye, and after a time remarked to Rosie: "So you have come."

"Yes, Mama Gordridge," replied Rosie, sitting listlessly, with a giving way of the spine, her eyes on the floor, "I thought I'd come."

"Oh, you thought so: so what made you think so?" asked the old lady.

"I knew you are by yourself, and I thought—"

"Oh, you knew that I am by myself. But in coming to me you have left your husband."

"He doesn't mind."

"So *I* mind? I was sitting here longing for you to come, of course."

"If you were, you would have sent for me long ago."

"What, to lug me about? and give me my gruel? And drag the old thing out of the fire?"

"You are too proud, Mama Gordridge."

“And you have allowed yourself to become very far too out-spoken!”

Rosie with down-turned eyes twirled her parasol without reply, until Mrs. Gordridge asked her why she came now rather than before, to which she made answer that she had come to say good-bye.

“So, then, are you really going from Glann-court?”

“With my husband, Mama Gordridge.”

“You had better not, you know.”

“Why so?”

“Because, firstly, of the reason for which your husband is going—”

“Oh, Mama Gordridge, don’t repeat that thing!”—Rosie laughed a little. “I don’t say it because he is my husband, for you know I am not one of the *femmes amoureuses*, but, of course, we women do know our husbands out and out, so you can accept my account of the matter; and if now you could get yourself to admit to him that you made a mistake, no doubt he would forgive and the difficulty would solve itself.”

The old lady’s gaze rested on those droves of ghosts in the haze that roved over The Meadows before the blows of the gale, and they implored her to forgive, for “life,” they said, “is short,

and, like us, its crises and chances roll eternally past, no more to return," but at Rosie's word "mistake" she hardened her heart, and only muttered: "Oh, *he* will do the forgiving, will he?"

"It is he who has been aspersed, you know," answered Rosie.

"But you appear to be very certain! Yet what has been asserted of your husband is not an impossibility."

"No, an untruth."

And now this assurance of Rosie's, so solid as to cast upon Mrs. Gordridge's mind a shadow of doubt, gave rise to the question within her: "Could the two witnesses of the theft have been at fault?" And she said to Rosie: "Why are you so sure? Has he sworn to you—?"

"No, Mama Gordridge," Rosie replied, "I haven't given myself the pains to make any inquisition—"

"So, then," answered the old woman, with a new hardening of the heart, "you spurned my discernment, you may say my word, in favour of a person who hadn't even asserted to you—?"

"He had no need!"

"Didn't he? Still, he is going. And you are going also?"

"I suppose so."

"But, I tell you, better not: for the relation between you and me which has never been broken since you were a child of five, may, if once broken, not be capable of being resumed."

"Wasn't it rather broken when you made me marry, Mama Gordridge?"

"May be; still, you have been about me, and if you sever yourself now—"

"I shall be quite glad to stay with you for a time, Mama Gordridge, since I know that you are lonely—"

"*I!*" Mrs. Gordridge stopped her with a chuckle: "so it will be for pity of me that you stay, not for your own good? Because I am lonely! Am I so very, very lonely, my God? And afraid of ghosts, I suppose! And eager for you to sleep with me, to keep them off me! *Who* gave you to know that I am afraid of ghosts? You have forgotten yourself, you have forgotten me, you have turned out a proud and an ungrateful girl!"

Rosie stood up with a pout.

"I am going," she said.

"Good old dog," said the old lady, tugging a Jap dog's hair.

"Don't part with me in anger, Mama Gordridge," said Rosie over her parasol: "I am quite

willing to stay with you, for a time—if you ask me.”

“For whose good?” asked Mrs. Gordridge, gazing up now not without a gleam of pleading in her gaze.

Rosie hesitated, and then she said: “For yours.”

“Go—go from me”—And Rosie, hastily putting a kiss on the old lady’s face, went out with a doubt and ache in her heart, nor did Mrs. Gordridge look after her, till after she had gone beyond the door, when she started up a moment—but sat again.

There she remained in her chair a long time after this, watching the funeral-train of mist moving and passing away whither it would in its strange mood, brooding on her life from its birth, and the folly-fire that it was, with its turns and pangs and works, asking herself if it had been worth living, and if life was not all a scurvy thing, and death not better; and she thought of Shan, whether there had been any chance of a mistake, whether, in any case, she could not have found means to forgive, and not for ever act as some goddess under instructions to mete out strict justice to men; in the midst of which meditations, seeing Shan and Rosie mak-

ing away under the same umbrella over a remote bit of The Meadows grounds, her soul groaned, recognising herself as alone in a crowded house of slaves, Anne Hine pouting in her grave, Rosie gone; and she was on the point of allowing her eye to moisten when a flunkey handed her a telegram which, on opening, she found to convey the message: "Profoundly regret to announce death of Arthur just posted in Whitehall, his column convoying returned empties engaged with Delarey midway between Zeerust and Krugersdorp. My profound regrets. Derby"—whereat the old lady threw up both her hands in a tremble above her head, and, oblivious of her stick, hobbled briskly from the room.

XVII

SHAN RELATES

THE evening following this Rosie, chin on palm, sat ruminating at a window so low and small, that one had need to stoop to look out of it—diamond-paned, half of it fixed, half a sideways slide, and the roof a smaller square than the room, and the room so small! not space enough in it for the display of even half of all those liquids, pots, little sponges, polishers, mysterious creams and lotions, feminine delicacies, with which Rosie kept that flesh of hers as dainty as a daisy, the chamber being a cabin enclosed in oblique planes, and like a real ship's-cabin in this, that, perched high there in the heart of its girdle of mountains, it ever heard round it voices and sounds of gales joined in many an organ-harmony of alto, and grave diapason raving, and vox humana calling, centuries of years of euphony so embalming its old beams in music, that now like old violin-woods they every moment resounded to those vowel-sounds, and of themselves were vocal.

It was the house of Shan's uncle, and Rosie's

pout and wrinkling-up of the nose on entering it had been playful, for it was bohemian, and a spree, but already now after twenty-four hours of it the white wife was beginning to recognise that white love in one's uncle-in-law's cottage is not all fun: and Glanncourt had its merits.

And as she sat there ruminating on it at her bedroom window, a little maid looked in to say that tea was ready.

"But Mr. O'Shannon hasn't come back," Rosie said.

"Yes, mum, he has, for I saw him," replied the child.

Rosie stood up, went down and out of the house, and looked down the road—below the level of which the cottage crouches in a bower—and up the road toward the Chase two hundred yards away, but could not see Shan; and she walked down the steep of the yard, which sheerly overlooks a ravine clothed all in firs, and beyond the ravine a world of vale with Severn in it trailing itself away through haze: but still could not anywhere see him. However, in coming back up, on peeping into the dark of an outhouse that was half-full of hay, she could see a form in there lying face downward on an old door, so she climbed in, and it was he.

Sitting by him on the hay, she pulled his hair, saying: "What, asleep?"

"No, I'm not asleep. . . ."

She could scarcely see his face, though he had sat up, but by his tone understood that he was in pain, such pain that she had to inquire several times what was wrong before he told her that he had received evil tidings, and was feeling bad.

"Come and tea," she said, "and then tell me."

"Rosie," was his answer, "you have to go back to Glanncourt."

"I? Why?"

"You must, you must, ah, you must," he wailed, shaking his bowed brow in his two palms.

"But why?"

"Let me tell you this," he answered with a great dreariness and drooping: "that you are an unmarried girl living with a man."

Rosie thought this over, and after some moments replied: "Am I? Who unmarried me? You aren't well—!"

"No, that's true, I am not well, for I have enough to make me crazy. . . . Aye, there's the gunner in God, and He will set up the lad that He chooses as a target, and shoot darts at him,

patiently, dart after dart, on this face and on that, till He has him dead and done. But don't suppose that I'm doting, Rosie, for what I've told you is true."

"Whatever do you mean, dear?" said Rosie, peering, her hand on his shoulder, into his face.

Several minutes of silence reigned before from Shan's bent head came any reply, till he moaned: "Stop, I will tell you, Rosie; wait, you shall have it; listen, and you will know. You know already, don't you, that I have a fondness for Lieutenant Gordridge? But you don't know, may be, how far it goes, for it began when I was barely thirteen, seeing that in that plantation of firs above Burton's there was a white wood-pigeon which a pheasant-hen had turned out of its nest, and she herself had laid six eggs in it, so I, knowing of this, went to clutch the eggs—three days after my thirteenth birthday it was, on April the 17th, 1885—and I was nicely in the tree getting the eggs when underneath I saw Mr. Grace, the head-keeper, gaping up at me: I'll ever remember it: without saying a word he grabbed me by the collar when I got down, and dragged me off to give it to me, no doubt; but when we got to the spot where the New Garden now is, we found Mr. Gordridge strolling

about there with Mr. Arthur, so old Grace, lugging me before them, told how I'd been copped in the act. Mr. Arthur laughed and slung his finger at me, as much as to say 'aren't you going to catch it hot,' but he begged his father to let me off, and his father went one better, for after talking aside with old Grace, who told him that I was a good one at most things, he asked me if I'd care to come on the estate, and from the next day till yesterday my life, you may say, has been given up to the pheasantry at Glanncourt."

"Yes," said Rosie, "and after all those years of faithful service, to be turned off on a charge of taking money—"

"Well, but I did take it," said Shan.

"Shan!"

"No, don't be shocked—"

"Oh, but *don't* say to me that it was you who stole—"

"No, Rosie, I didn't say stole, I said took. Wait and you will be told, listen and you will know, how our lives can be like rocketers caught broadside-on by a wind, and hurled, with a curl on, a thousand yards awry out of our course: and does the bird know what causes the blow that's caught her? or can anyone tell me the tale how

the earth was made out of air, and where the dirt was delved that made it? Ah, there's an answer to it all in the air, and you can watch the cat's ear twitch to catch it, may be, but men's ears are not artful enough for it. Anyway, from that April the 17th when Lieutenant Gordridge and I came together through my trying to get a clutch of eggs we were like hand and glove for years. Is there a belt, or heath, or turnip-field, a brake, upland, or gorse, a river or stream, anywhere for miles round that our feet haven't haunted together? I don't think so. He had a tutor who didn't too much care, Mrs. and Mr. Gordridge gave him rein, and it was kill, kill, with us, like two young tigers on the prowl together, a regular carouse of prey. One day it came into his head to take out the South Gates fox-hounds—Oh, he was a crazy one!—so he contrived to get Squire Sinclair, the master's, consent, and, starting a fox, he and I alone, mind you, after a grand run, you can hardly credit it, yes, we killed'n. Guess, now, whether we were pleased with ourselves that evening! So, going home, he says to me, 'Bull's-head,' he says, for that was his name for me, seeing that I wore my hair long, and my head was more than my body, so to say, I being lank for my age, 'Bull's-head,'

he said, 'what's your age?' So I told him, on which he called out: 'By Jove, we were born on the same day!' aye, and within two hours of the same night, too, as I now know, he in a mansion, I in a cottage, yet out of the same darkness, under the same night-stars, into this same stew. Rosie, I remember going tingly all over me! and from that evening we were still dearer friends. One afternoon going home with our kills—his father was dead then, he himself had gone to Rugby, and this was in the holidays—I asked him if he liked me, so after looking me frankly in the face, he said, 'Bucephalus'—for 'Bucephalus' is the same as 'Bull's-head'—'there's no one anywhere that I like better'; then he told me that I was 'archaic,' and when I asked him what that meant, he told me that I frequently reminded him of Abraham and Moses and that crew—I have never been able quite to fathom what his meaning was. Well, the very next day he gave me that palish photograph—"

"But, Shan," murmured Rosie, "I have heard most of these details before, dear, and it is raining, and spray spattering in through this roof, so make haste and tell me what you were thinking of in saying that I am 'unmarried,' and that you—took the money."

“Sit on this side where it is dry,” replied Shan. . . . “Well, then, I won’t worry you about all that, and I’ll skip over the years in which I began to fix my heart upon you, and in which I got Mrs. Gordridge to say that she would see if she could give you to me. During those years Lieutenant Gordridge and I were parted, and how much he remembered of all that had been between us two I don’t know, but as to me, Rosie, it has all been hoarded in my heart, as a Jew treasures his jewels, and as a grouse remembers the number of her brood where they wait on the ground in the broom, aye, it has all been hoarded in my heart. Then he came, ill—a year and three months and three days ago, on September the 24th. I was at the station waiting, but—he was too ill to notice me. He must have been still ill when, seeing you anew, he fell in love with you. On the Friday before he arrived you had as good as promised to marry me . . . he must have known it all, yet he courted you . . . Lord God Almighty forgive me! I broke in his ribs for it. . . .”

“Dear, it was a fair fight,” breathed Rosie.

“Yes, dear, a fair fight, but you don’t know—my holy one—my heart’s brother—born both under one moon—and I bruised him like a

mark, and most damnably broke his bones. . . . Well, never mind—what was I saying? Oh, but I had some excuse, mind you, for I wasn't too sure then that he meant quite well by you, and it was only after my three-days' knock-about with the police, and after he had come and rescued me out of their claws, that she who is in her tomb this night came to me where I stood underneath the cottage beech, assured me that he had meant to marry you, and showed me that I had been most cruel to him; upon which I just snatched up one of the bobbies' bykes, and was away to the station, where I came just in time to make friends with him: and, Rosie, I vowed to him then that I'd renounce all hope of marrying you—”

Now the white wife's heart began to beat more wildly as a sort of dawn-twilight broke in upon her brain, and she breathed: “Strange thing! Anne once told me that it was so. . . .”

“Aye, *she* knew, for she knew what was in each one's mind, you see, though she wasn't always right either, poor sweet, she ran riot here or there. So that was settled, Rosie: he was to go to the war, and I to guard you—”

“But he accepted such a promise?” Rosie asked.

“ It was freely made! he didn't force—! ”

“ Well, go on.”

“ The very next day Mrs. Gordridge had me brought to her with the bandages still round my bruises, to offer to give you to me. I refused you, threw up my job, not wishing to be too near to you, and moved up here, not meaning to be too far from you. Well, six days afterwards I was sawing up wood on the well up there under the road when Yotty Perkins, the fish-pedlar, told me that you were off to—Persia, he said, not China; but it was five days before the possibility that it might be true suddenly struck me one night, and you know how you were actually going when I flurried up, halted the carriage, and vowed to Mrs. Gordridge that I would marry you—”

“ And you *did*,” she put in.

“ Yes, but wait. You may think now that I was happy, having you without quite violating my vow to the lieutenant: but, if I was happy down my right side, so to say, my heart was far enough from it, for this world is made, not of one dirt, look, but of two, and the grass, now, that the cow eats, though you may think that it is green, it isn't, for it is scarlet, too, and the cow casts out all that's green of it, and keeps the

red, and how could a rose-tree throw out roses as scarlet as the cow's gore, if the leaves are green alone? No, the ground's scarlet, and the sun is, and mortal men are. So I was pretty sad and mad, in spite of my heaven, and you know how on the Sunday of our banns I broke loose in the night, doing sixty pounds of damage, which sixty pounds I should be glad of now, God knows, and on the Monday forenoon I tore his photograph to shreds. . . . But on the Wednesday I got a cablegram from him, asking me to give his mother the news of his arrival at the Cape, signed 'Arthur,' signifying that he hadn't forgotten one hour of our youth, and was still in a closer union with me than with his own mother. . . . He thanked me for my faithfulness to him. . . . Rosie, could I marry you after this? and yet I couldn't let you be shipped abroad, so, after thinking it over for five days, I determined in my head to break the law of the land, and without saying a word to anyone, I took the train for London, purposing to marry some girl up there first, and then, returning, go through the pretence of marrying you. . . ."

With wide eyes the white wife clung to his arm at this, frightened at the audacity of this manhood, trying to see his face in the dark, hardly

yet finding room in her brain for all that this meant to her life, or for the deluge of radiance that now drenched her consciousness, while outside the hay-shed the rain rushed down now with a grave sound, and touched their faces with sprays to which they gave no attention.

“Shan! and you did it?”

“Yes, I did it. At first I meant to marry a girl. . . . but, then, the injustice to the girl. . . . I married the first old bag of rags that I met in a pub in Bethnal Green, that same Mrs. Graves—”

“Shan!”

“Aye, *she's* my wife.”

“Dear one! Never mind, dear!”

“No, it is nothing: I was only—”

Suddenly Rosie clapped palms once together.

“I am to be mistress of Glanncourt, after all!”

“No, Rosie, stop—”

“Ah, wouldn't Mama Gordridge eat out her heart at it. . . . O! that would be sweet. . . . The only pity is that Anne's dead, she'll never know now—”

“Oh, Rosie, stop, I have not told you, my tongue shies—”

“But why didn't you let me into it all along?” asked the white wife, her mind all too

flighty with excitement to collect itself to hearken: "you might have told me—!"

"No, Rosie, I might have, but I could not breathe it even to you," said he, "I felt so creepy of the least fear of a hint of the secret leaking through to the mistress' ears. I am not one for airing my cares, as you know, and then again I was weak, dear, I couldn't resist the greed I had of seeing you regard me as your master and owner—oh, it was my reign, my fling, you don't know, my usurpation of you and term of office, fast-fleeting, as when a head-boy is appointed to look after his school, and he stalks like a cock, his heart sinking each time he thinks of the teacher coming back, and the collapse of his kingship; but in spite of this, I think I should have told you, only I was shy of it, oh, I shrank, Rosie—"

"But the old woman knew—"

"Aye, to my woe, I had to tell her: for when I asked her to pass through the form of marriage with me, she wants to know *why*, the Cockney fox, and, as I had only four days, I had to let out to her that I wished to marry-without-marrying someone else, whereupon with that cunning twitching of her eyes, she said aye, she would, on condition that I signed a paper; so I

signed to pay her nine shillings a week, without, however, letting her know from what part of the country I had sprung, meaning always to forward her the cash through James Davis in Winchester: and how the old hound's nose eventually contrived to track me out down here I even now don't know. Well, that was on the Thursday night, and on the Friday, going, as I was directed, to a place which they call the Vicar General's Office, in Ludgate Hill, I got a licence with a stamp on it, and the same evening, after rigging her in new clothes, carted her to the superintendent registrar in Bethnal Green, to give notice of it. No marrying the following day, for one day must pass; no marrying on the Sunday: on the Monday at noon we were married: on the Tuesday at two I had to marry you. But I couldn't get away! My wife clung to me, insisting on seeing me off, which was just what I didn't mean her to do, nor would I wire to Glanncourt, I was so chary of letting a soul dream that I had been anywhere near London. But stealing clear of her on the Tuesday morning, I first of all wired James Davis, beseeching him to wire my coming to Glanncourt, and, on getting to Gloucester, hired a bicycle—"

"I see it all now," said Rosie: "this old

being, when she found you out down here, threatened to inform against you for bigamy unless you kept her pocket always full, is that it? and that's why we were often poor, and why you took the money: for if she had only opened her mouth, I might possibly have been shipped away out of Arthur's way, and it was Arthur's money which you took to disburse for Arthur's behoof, is that it? But, dear, mightn't you have applied to Mama Gordridge for money, or to Arthur, rather than suffer all the tortures you must have gone through?"

"Apply to Mrs. Gordridge I couldn't," Shan answered: "I was too shy of having her even dreaming that I was in trouble for money, for she would immediately have been set questioning how that could have come about; and to Lieutenant Gordridge I did write—three letters in all, the first two to let him know that you were going all right—"

"I wondered why you would never let me see his letters to you! So what kind of words did Arthur discover to unburden his heart in about all your bounty toward him and me?"

"Rosie, he never knew what I have done, he was never to know."

"But why haven't you told him from the first?"

“What? When I myself at one hour wasn’t sure of myself for the next hour, just think in what a stew *he*, if he had known, would have lived at the thought of his future wife living as a wife with a man, ever doubtful in his heart at what moment I might go dog-mad and damn all our lives. Besides, Mrs. Gordridge, shrinking from letting him know yet that you were married, had got me to promise to be mum: so I locked it all up in my heart, and wrote to him with a hard rein on my pen, waiting for him to appear that I might relate it to him face to face, and hear what he would say. But finally, when I felt myself being strangled by Mrs. Graves, and when, though I kept turning both the eggs and birds of the estate into money, I couldn’t appease the woman’s greed, I just wrote the whole story to Lieutenant Gordridge, asking for funds—”

“Ah, he does know now, then!” said Rosie gladly.

“I wonder?” he went, and groaned. . . .
“Not from that letter anyway, Rosie, for that letter, as it happened, was with those same mails in that same train which De Wet burned after making a shambles of the 4th Derbies on that Rhenoster kopje, and after gunning Rhooed-
val station, and looting those great-coats—”

“ So even now Arthur doesn't know?”

“ He *may* now.”

“ Oh, you wrote again?”

“ Not that I wrote again Oh, God, I suppose I must tell you—” and now, Shan, catching out of his pocket a copy of the *Star* and a box of matches, in the glare of a match showed Rosie the name of Gordridge in the paper.

“ Missing! ”

Shan hastily caught from his pocket another paper, a later edition, struck another match, and in its glare showed Rosie the name of Gordridge.

“ Killed! ”

“ Yes, killed,” said he, and now he dropped down again upon the old door on the hay.

“ Oh, but poor Mama Gordridge! ” Rosie breathed, shrinking.

From the breast of Shan there escaped an outcry of distress: “ my brother. . . . ! ” while ever down with a showery grave sound brushed the rain outside, drowning the shrubbery, the ground, struggling through spouts, with gulps goblins sobbing in the night. . . .

XVIII

SHAN AWAITING

THE next day it still rained, so when the pony-cart came to the gate to take Rosie's trunks, which were already packed to go back to Glanncourt, Rosie, sitting on one of them, said: "No! I will wait till to-morrow."

On the morrow Rosie, instead of going down to Glanncourt, pouted at her pretty nails, wrote to her Mama Gordridge on the death of Arthur, and now awaited an answer which, slow in coming, came cold; Shan, for his part, being most hard-worked in those days, having taken over the thirteen acres of farm from his uncle, who had flitted, would be with her hardly twice a day at meals, and, waiting now to see what she would do, breathed not another syllable about her going back to Glanncourt, for she was eye-bright to his eyes in the cottage. But one day in late January, coming in and finding her with her skirt turned up and her hair frowsy at housework—for though half of their old luxury of furniture had been sold, half had been brought up hither, and she was keeping it neat—he got

angry, saying to her: "Rosie, if ever I see you doing such work again, you must only go to Glanncourt."

Rosie puffed out smoke into his face, replying: "You pronounce it like a threat, as though Glanncourt wasn't a more pleasant place to live in than this hole in the ground. And if I don't do things, who is to? Who does most of the cooking—?"

"Do you?"

"Fond male! so do you imagine that Jane does all the work?"

"Then, I shall have to get a second girl."

"What, want a whole zenana? . . . No, Shan, you are nothing to me, you are sheltering and nourishing me, so I earn my living. Besides, I am going home in a few days, for I am only injuring the last rags of my demireputation by lingering in this den."

He made no answer to this, gazed out of window, till in some minutes he said: "Whether you go to stay or no, you really should go now to see Mrs. Gordridge, Rosie."

"Has Mrs. Gordridge written to ask me?" asked Rosie.

"As good as! . . . Rosie, do take care, now, that you don't give folks grounds to accuse you of

ingratitude—she is good, she is very good, and her soul is very sad. And now there is this new thing to make her wretched. . . . Haven't you heard yet? Look—” he showed her a newspaper huge-lettered with the words: “The Queen Dead.”

“Oh, she's dead. . . . But for what reason should Mama Gordridge be wretched at that, since she was not at all a gossip of the queen.”

“But isn't everybody more or less sad at it, especially those, I suppose—?”

“I am not, then, I am sure,” said the white wife: “she wouldn't have been wretched if I had died.”

“Oh, Rosie, you have a hard heart,” said Shan.

“Sure, now, it hasn't got one little soft spot in it about the bigness of a pea?”

“Has it? For whom is that?”

“For people that I like, then, and for people that like me, not for my queenie. Women possess more sense than men, you see.”

“And less sympathy with the earth's thirst and throbbings, probably; still, Mrs Gordridge will grieve, I am sure, if there is any room at all in her for greater grief. . . . So, Rosie, you are going to her in a few days?”

“I be.”

“The very best thing that you could do. . .
To stay, or only for the day?”

“To stay.”

“Best thing—! But, then, will you be telling her everything?”

“At any rate,” said Rosie heatedly, “I’ll be telling her enough to make her eat her nails for accusing people of stealing money!”

“As if she could help doing what she did! Why tell her anything at all? Her bad opinion of me I can still bear, for you can’t explain why I took the money without explaining that you aren’t my wife, and, that once out, good-bye to your ever being allowed to be with me again.”

“Ah! won’t that be hard to bear!” sighed the white wife with eyes cast up white: “I can just see myself weeping in my widow’s-weeds. . . . No more Shan, girls, the sugar’s all done.”

“Well, it is well to be young, Rosie, and to have a laughing heart that throws off things.”

“Hark! Methuselah declaims. But I am not so young as my teeth, Mr. O’Shannon, if you but knew it: you see, I’m pretty complex inside, a regular enigma underneath my what-do-you-call-it; and, if *I* wasn’t gay, a gloomy little pair we two should make together, shouldn’t we?”

In fact, the white wife, in showing more jollity than she quite felt, *was* in those weeks a little "complex," feeling underneath, as she did, how complete must be Shan's grief at that death of Arthur, from whom he was never now to receive that grasp of the hand and glance of gratitude that he must have looked forward to as the reward of all his work. And the boomerang of that bigamy of his! He had broken his life for Arthur—the Boers had doubly broken it in breaking his obligation to Arthur; he had kept the white wife white because of a living man—though the man was dead, she had still to be kept white because of a living woman; and though the woman was old, being seventy, she might still for a score of years live a vampire at his blood, not only with a claim upon his pocket, for maintenance, but with a threat of imprisonment held over his head, for waste. As for Rosie herself, that death of Arthur was the death of a lover who wanted to make her the lady of Glann-court, so that, on the whole, her gaieties whenever Shan came in were gaieties with a purpose, and in divers other ways she had turned very good, going on Sundays to the white chapel a mile down the road, whose score or so of devout congregated to it from great distances,

giving, too, to tramps, showing her face in cottages where sickness or want was, and in those long evenings singing and playing "Lead, Kindly Light," may be, or reading to Shan from the books which he liked, from "Progress and Poverty," from "Paradise Lost," and "The Pilgrim's Progress," and the Old Testament, till her big empty head nodded toward slumber. Meantime, she watched with much quiet interest in what fashion Shan bore his grief, with what groans, with what glooms, with what broodings of the brow, how far his manhood failed, how far it succeeded, in concealing his heart-break, how now a nimble Achilles he rebounded to his feet from the knock-down, till now afresh the surges of his adversity redrowned him, and now he harnessed himself as a horse to his fate and drew hardily in the traces, till now he found the way waste, and wailed. In her heart Rosie called him the carle of sorrows. But time ivies every abruptness, and then, moreover, those old pains of struggle against the gripe and virus of Rosie's graces were over now for him—or not wholly over may be, but now he knew and trusted himself, as he never would have discovered and recognized himself, had not those words of Anne Hine's: "great as the

greatest heroes of history," once greeted his ears, words which were as a revelation to him of a dream once somewhere dreamed and nearly forgotten, giving him to be never thenceforth quite the same kind of simple Simon, but ever thenceforth a firmer stepper on the earth. And when that last year of the century which had yielded him so much tribulation had passed away, and the new era's first Spring was blooming, he threw off that mood of brooding, turning anew to the love of a universe whose face just there has a fay's fascination. The death of Arthur—or rather the report of Arthur's death, for in this as in some other known cases a death was reported where no death had taken place—was both made more baleful by the Spring, and tended to increase Shan's feeling of luck at being alive and present at such a show. "I saw a dead starling on the shed this morning," he told Rosie, strolling with her over the Chase one night, "and felt so sorry for it, that it had just missed this day!" "That squadron of clouds sailing up there behind the mountain," he informed her one lowering afternoon of March, "are just newly arrived in Britain from the Brazils, and are now eastward bound for Siberia: they have a high time." The Comforters re-

turned, his heart was enlarged. He saw the fields grow suddenly hairier-rough than Esau under grasses; over the meadows he watched dandelions like stars cast their hosts in constellations, and daisies in milky-ways, making of two acres a universe; those groves hung above the Wye, almost visible from his windows, wildly wantoning, grew to resemble some seraglio all gracious with rugs, draperies, waving valenciennes, given up to toying, a life of joyance, languished orgies, in which morning or midnight the voice of the organ darkling walks; nor of all this was he a spectator only, knowing well that *he* was *it*, it he, vein of his vein, and when, lifting up his heart, he hailed, calling out to it "well-beloved!" the mountains all with dumb mouths calling babbled back to him: "well-beloved!" In the midst of which new zest there was always still, nevertheless, his thorn in the flesh, the old woman sending for more money than he had to send her.

"I don't intend to bear it much longer," he said to Rosie all within a little bower of gorse on the Chase whither they often strolled together hatless of a gloaming, "for now that Lieutenant Gordridge is dead I am no longer so shy of her tongue as I have been, seeing that all that she

can do to me now is to get me into prison for a month or two, and, since I have broken the law, I often feel disposed to undergo it of my own accord."

"The law be jiggered," said the gay girl, "if you did such a *bêtise*, you would not only force your judge to commit a crime, but you would force me away from you, since I could not, of course, stay with a gentleman generally known to be the husband of the prophetess Anna. I only stay with you through bad habit, and, if I once go away, I am bound to fall in love with someone or other, I know, forget all about you, and never see you 'more.' So I vote that you even keep on paying—it won't be for long, for a lady of seventy who dances the cake-walk can't last."

"Well, I shall do as you advise me, dear," said Shan, "and God keep me from hungering for the death of a fellow-creature. I only wish I had that forty pounds now—Wasn't that, now, a mysterious business how I lost that money! I can't even dream—"

"I believe that it was Anne who took it," remarked Rosie suddenly; and Shan started.

"I don't, of course, mean," Rosie added, "that she stole it in an ordinary sense: but we

now know that she was brain-sick about that time, crazy after you, and so may have had some motive—that is, if you really did leave it on the mantelpiece.”

Shan was silent; then he said: “Yes, it may have been she, and, if so, I can see her dear motive: she wished, by making me poor may be, to push me sooner to end my troubles, for she judged that you would never come with me if I was driven away, and there her fine scent ran riot, as she ran riot in conjecturing that I meant to commit suicide. Yet what else was she to conjecture, since she knew that I was guarding you for Lieutenant Gordridge, saw me marry you, and was just not fly enough to strike the idea that my marriage might be null. . . . The dear! . . . She died because of me, but don’t talk, Rosie, about her being ‘crazy after’ *me*; she wasn’t made of the common clay; she believed that I had done a noble deed, and her love was as pure and beautiful as that moon that you see moving up yonder—purer, for the moon’s rolled up in a struggle with those pitchy vapours which she throws her glare on—look at her, like the combustion of a bonfire—on earth it is May, but in heaven it’s the Fifth of November.”

“Look at the Chase,” said Rosie, “one would imagine a conflagration with the fog rolling like smoke . . . funny. . . .”

“Yes, and it is getting pretty cold, too, we had better be going back”—and along a foot-path they passed in single file through a waste of bracken, where a scraggy nag or two browsed in God’s eye throughout the reign of the night; and hence down a road they roamed to their home.

XIX

SHAN IN LUCK

It was only three days later that Shan received a letter even more pressing than usual from his old woman, praying for twenty pounds without delay; it had, however, two strangenesses: that it made no threats, and when Shan showed it to Rosie, she said at once: "This isn't her writing."

"Perhaps she is ill," replied Shan gravely.

"Hip!" said Rosie; "over-much jigging—"

"No, Rosie, don't be hard-hearted; she hasn't a bad old heart on the whole."

"But *I* have? The first wife better loved than the second, girls, as usual! You don't know me, Mr. O'Shannon."

"Rosie, have you a good heart?"

"I can pity; yes, I can pity."

"Is that so?"

"Oh, I can *pity*. You little know *me*: pity is the grand thing in me; with a white anguish and shut eyes, from the pit of my soul to the tip of my tingling lips I can pity."

"Well, now!"

"That's Rosie."

"Rosie, do you pity me?"

"A little bit like *that*."

"Well, that's a lot. So what shall I do now about this thing? There is something muggy about this."

"I should send her the base gold," said the white wife, "for the more you send her the more she will jig, and the more she jigs—"

"No," said Shan, "I know what I shall do: I won't send: I will wait"—a decision which turned lucky, for, as when one by starving worms causes them to squirm forth, some days afterwards Shan, in walking on his business down the mountain, encountered a man who asked him whereabouts Mr. O'Shannon hung out, and when Shan gave him to know that he was O'Shannon, the man said: "I am from Mrs. Graves."

He was a thing young, lank, pink of trunk, and his being stank of drink.

"Who are you?" asked Shan.

"I am Mrs. Graves' nephew."

"How is Mrs. Graves?"

"She is all right."

"So what do you want?"

"I come about the money."

“ Which money?”

“ Why, the twenty quid, mister.”

“ Why didn’t she write for it herself?”

“ A nasty touch of the influenza she had; got a pal to write it for her, poor old girl.”

“ But why hasn’t she come for it herself?”

“ She’s got the influenza very bad.”

“ What, still?”

“ Aye, still, poor old soul.”

“ You said that she is ‘ all right.’ ”

“ Well, *you* understand my meaning, don’t you? I meant that she’s still in the land of the living—that sort of thing—poor old soul.”

“ Well, I would never have thought that you are her nephew.”

“ How’s that, then?”

“ You aren’t half so knowing, now, as your aunt.”

“ What’s your meaning, mister?”

“ It’s nothing. But twenty pounds isn’t the right amount.”

“ Well, I’m well aware of that, but she told me, if you won’t tip her the twenty, then make it fifteen. It’s worth something, too, working up these here hills. Lord! talking of hills, you’ve some hills about here—mountains I call ’em.”

“ But fifteen isn’t the right amount either.”

"I know that . . . I forget what is; she *did* tell me, too—poor old girl."

"But if I don't choose to send it—what then?"

"Oh, but you'll do her twelve, anyway—she lying ill, too, poor old soul."

"Twelve isn't the amount. I won't send more than eight."

"There you are! Eight will do—I'm not hard."

"Seven is the right amount really."

"Seven? But by the time I have paid my fare—"

"I doubt if I could let her have more than seven to-day."

"Seven let it be! There! I can't say fairer. I'll *have* the seven, provided it's down."

"Ah, but you are not your aunt's nephew. . . ."

"What can be your meaning?"

"Tell me this: why ought I to give anything at all? What claim has this Mrs. Graves upon me?"

"You have often given her oof before, that's a sure thing."

"I admit that. But what *claim* has she?"

"That's neither here nor there, mister. I only——"

“Don’t you know?”

“I do know, yes——”

“Mention it and you shall have the twenty pounds down.”

The fellow hesitated.

“There’s a pound to pay your fare,” said Shan, patting his shoulder, “you go home and get some work”—and he walked on down the mountain-steep, leaving the Cockney gaping after him.

Coming home sooner than usual that evening, he found Rosie reading in a lounge-chair underneath the cherry-tree, and was met with the exclamation: “But tea isn’t ready!”

“Rosie,” said he, “I am obliged to leave you.”

“For aye?” says she.

“Two days. Think you won’t be too lonely, now,—with Jane?”

“Oh, I am inured now to manlessness, you know, and so, I don’t doubt, is Jane. But what’s up?”

“It’s nothing. . . .”

“Wild retort! and your eyes sparkling and crackling like a whirl of circus-girls all in spangles. One would imagine that someone was dead——”

“No—don’t say that of me: no one is dead to my knowledge.”

“So where are you going?”

“You will know when I get back,” and no more could Rosie win from him. Having hastily packed a hand-bag, he made off down the mountain.

The white wife was left now with a mind at work upon a crowd of surmises, and lived in a vacuum for two days, during which not a line came from Shan. On the evening after, she keenly expected him; but it was not till the following morning that she got a telegram—from London—and at ten that night was in the garden hearkening to a nest of nightingales warbling, when the gate swung back, and, bag in hand, in he hastened.

“Oh, I am glad,” she said to him, as she shook hands. “Why didn’t you send a line?”

“Vision that she is,” Shan’s lips muttered, for the white wife like the cherry-tree shimmered all in garments of white that night, with wide sleeves, and gauzes, and white shoes in the moonshine, and she reeked with aromas more rich than the cherry-tree’s. Shan kissed her hand.

“Supper’s ready,” she said, and they went

into a small room, rudely built, but finely furnished, where while he ate in a kind of haste, Rosie, with her elbows on the table, sat waiting with a pale nose that showed up the four old-gold freckles, giving brief replies to his questions, and in the midst of a silence said: "Don't keep me, dear."

"She's dead," said Shan.

"Mrs. Graves?"

"She's dead."

Rosie went quite white, then threw up roses, which soon perished once more, then confounded the rouge and white, like a flower-show of roses reflected in a freshet. She had fattened and bloomed out in the bosom of these mountains, and feasted deep. Shan looked at her changes of colour with a shy eye; and presently in strained accents she uttered the words: "Dust to dust, jigger to digger, Graves to grave."

"Really, Rosie," said Shan, laying down his knife and fork to underlook her with reproach, "that seems rather heartless of you."

"My dear," said Rosie, "your anger at my gladness is due to the fact that you are secretly glad yourself. She was an expense, and the enemy. And since I did not know her, why

should I be sad? Someone dies with every tick of the clock, and one is not too sad."

"But to this woman I owe something," said Shan. "She was crafty, she looked after Number One, but she wasn't bad: for though she squeezed me all she could for her own good, she refused to give my secret away to her friends, though they entreated her to, and she remembered that I was her husband, and was true to her word."

He then told how he had found out everything, how the old lady in mounting into a train to come down to him, being in a drunken state, had tumbled and dislocated something. . . .

They sat in lounge-chairs on the footway between the flowers and the front-door, Rosie's chair two feet further removed from Shan's than usual, heard without hearing the night-birds' burden, and conversed of one Tom Price, a wight of that part, as to whom Shan in walking up the road had just heard that, having been invalided home from the war, he had a week before returned to Woodston: and Shan meant in a day or two to look Tom up, to hear what Tom had to say for himself; after which, conversation, usually fluent where they two talked together, grew grudging, and when Shan went

to hold a match to Rosie's cigarette, she took the match in her own fingers, and when he jumped up to replace her fallen lace-wrap round her shoulders, she murmured "it is all right," and wrapped it round herself.

He did not that night, as always, put his lips to her palm in saying good-night, for she gave to his shy organism the impression that he had somehow gravely offended her, and "If she thinks," he thought within himself, "that now that I am free I mean to take advantage of her finding herself here with me, which is due to her kindness, to force myself upon her, she is very much mistaken, for a man has some pride."

The morning after, the white wife, on bounding down to breakfast, though she was generally later, said to him: "Do excuse my lateness"; at meals their politeness to each other became ideal, and their conversations, feats of invention, were on botany and the state of politics. Shan, meanwhile, that whole week, was extremely miserable, he who, on hearing of the death of the old woman, had dreamed of being so blithe. Infected with melancholy, inert, all restless, he could hardly work, would not give himself the trouble to go for a chat with Tom Price, the new-comer from the war, and shirked the gossip

of the passers by his turnip-plot. His being was thronged with one thing only—Rosie: what Rosie had said last night, and what flower Rosie had chosen to pluck an hour since, and what could have been her real meaning in saying or doing this or that; leaning over the thole of his snathe, on a sudden he started, and found that he had lost half-an-hour of profound reverie in going over in his head the ins and outs of the brigue between him and Rosie the previous evening. What was wrong? he asked himself: the old woman was well dead, the stone-wall down that had kept them apart; and lo now, a new wall, made without hands out of the stuff of their own frames, fantastic, rarer than air, tougher than stone. Was it some adder that had addled Adam's blood with its dart? For each day the gulf broadened, she holding her head more haughtily aloof from him, he making believe to be thinking of anything but of her, and it was all a bitter pity, he thought, a thing to wring a tear out of the drought of scorching brass, since it just happened so without reason, and mortal power could not stop it.

After five or six days of it his face had become quite drawn, for he could hardly eat, though the thirst that burned his inwards caused him to

drink enormously. To be away from her was to be a castaway on a raft, and to be near her was to be sick of a fever. He thought that, if he could tell her all, she would shew him some pity, for she had said that she was most pitiful, but tell her he could not, seeing that there was some kink or other in him, he being made like that, no doubt, too shy and proud to bring himself to it, for it was she who had begun it, and he would die sulking of his hunger, like the vulture cribbed in a cage, whose heart knew its own heart-break. If with thoughts of this sort he maundered on Tuesday, all inert and maudlin, on Wednesday he would rend up handfuls of grass in an agony, and it lasted till Rosie one evening broke a silence between them by coming out with the announcement that she was just about to go back to Glanncourt.

“So you will be leaving me?” replied Shan in a tone of polite regret at the going of a guest.

“Yes, I am so awfully sorry,” said Rosie, “since I have liked being up here so much.”

“Why not stay on, since you like it?” Shan asked: “I need hardly say that *I* should be delighted, if you did.”

“Yes, I only wish it was not wholly impossible; but, of course, after the death that has

lately happened, it is hardly any more quite—*comme il faut*, is it?”

“Well, no, I suppose that that is so.”

“I wrote to Mama Gordridge to-day, duly making my submission, and saying that I am going”—and now Shan became as blanched as a ghost.

“There’s the letter in the rack,” remarked Rosie, and she rose and shewed him the envelope with the address on it writ large.

“Oh, it isn’t posted,” he remarked.

“No, I haven’t been out.”

“Shall I run down the road, and post it for you—now?”

“If you will be so obliging. . . . But, after all, no, I have something to add, I will post it to-morrow.”

On the following evening he noticed that the letter was no longer there, and when she gave him the information that she had been arranging her trunks during the twilight, this caused him anew to whiten and wince. Then followed a discussion as to the pony-chaise, and as to who was to take it down the mountains with the trunks, he promising to look to it, and when Rosie complained of the carman who had brought her up, Shan said that someone else

should be procured, and in the end it was mutually agreed that each difficulty would disappear, and the trunks duly reach Glanncourt.

And during the ensuing evening but one the trunks, by the ingenuity and thews of Shan and a driver, were duly squeezed down through the stairs, taken out to the gate, and placed upon the chaise; and now Rosie with her gloves and hat on, parasol in hand, stood alone within the house-door with Shan, Jane standing out at the gate, waiting there to see her go.

“I think that there is nothing more to be said,” Rosie said: “I have given all instructions to Jane, who will look after you.”

“That will be all right,” said he.

“So good-bye.”

“Good-bye.”

They shook hands.

“You can come and see me sometimes at Glanncourt,” said she.

“I shall be glad to do that,” said he.

“Besides, as I shall be informing Mama Gordridge of everything now, she will henceforth no doubt be on her knees to you to come back, in which case we shall see each other occasionally.”

“Let us hope so,” said Shan.

“ So good-bye.”

“ Good-bye.”

They shook hands.

“ I—regret to have to go away from you just at present,” said Rosie, “ for you don’t look over-well.”

“ It’s nothing,” said he.

Bent over her parasol, eyeing the ground, her mouth trembled, as she whispered: “ I enjoyed being up here.”

“ Yes, the air’s so fresh,” he muttered.

“ Oh, Shan, don’t be so proud,” said Rosie, fixing him with a look of reproach.

“ What can I *do*?”

“ Implore me to stay. . . .”

“ Have pity!” he now shouted at her in a passion, upon which the white wife turned in haste, and fled away up to her chamber, in the middle of which she stood all laughters and sobbings like a dying light that flickers wildly up alternately and burns low with sobs, while lying on a sofa below Shan also was piping his eye, with whinings; and thus by one bold blow the bowls of bewitchment which had imprisoned them were broken, and the boxes, by dint of brains and of brawn, were brought back up the stairs.

That evening they made a gay pair, and Shan kneeling in grass at her feet beneath the cherry-tree, asked her what could have been "wrong between us these last ten days?"

"I don't know," Rosie replied: "some fly must have stung you."

"Oh, yes, stung *me!*" he laughed. "But now that we are engaged, it is I who ought to be going away—"

"How long will it take?"

"Five days anyway, I gather."

"Don't you trouble to go," she whispered: "I'll trust you!"

"And are we to live up here? You know, Rosie, that we are pretty poor. . . ."

"We shall live up here all the summer," said she, "for I like being here now, and then we shall go down, and you will start kippuring again in our old cottage."

"God's good, after all. . . ." his brow bowed down; then, looking up sharply—"I say, do you remember that old threat of mine to make you flush, if you were a snow-flake? It isn't Tom, Dick or Harry that you are having for a husband, mind: I seem to be somebody, an ancestor of Ansons and Nelsons"

She bit his chin.

“ My difficulty is,” he added, “ to marry quite on the quiet about here, for, if old Fitchett, the registrar at Ebbstow, knows me, that will be awkward; but I don’t think that he does, and as to the licence, that I shall be getting from Mr. Beth, the surrogate, beyond the Forest, who, I’m sure, never heard of my having been married to you before. It will be all right! ”

“ Five days, is it?” asked Rosie.

“ So Mr. Carter told me to-day. I’ll see if by wit or work one can’t turn it into four! ”

The next morning, hurrying down from the mountain to go to the surrogate, he saw a wooden leg stumping through Netherend village, and grasped the hand of Tom Price, with whom, as he was rather late for the train, he did not stop to talk, but, calling backward that they should shortly meet each other, hurried onward. The same day he made the affidavit as to “ no impediment,” and on the third day, returning to the same surrogate, got the licence, with which he went straight to the Ebbstow registrar, and, elated that the registrar, whom he knew well, had not known him, came home to find the white wife almost as occupied with lady’s-work, repairing this, changing that, Jane aiding, as if this was her first marriage. The next

day he was in possession of the registrar's certificate and licence to marry.

That evening, the marriage-eve, he brought her home the tidings that Mrs. Gordridge had hurriedly left Glanncourt for London that day; brought her also a card-board box crowded with bridal flowers, lilies with stiff bright pistils couched in maiden-hair, anemones japonicæ as odorous as the Orient—stolen goods out of Glanncourt hot-houses—thinking to surprise her who rather surprised him by the fête of garden-flowers with which he found the house all garnished, and by the white cake which waited, so that in nothing the second wedding might hang behind the first, or leave a feeling of incompleteness on the nerves.

Before supper he had again to go out, for in the activities of that day he had nearly forgotten, what was his business every Friday evening, to visit Anne Hine's grave with flowers: so, taking some of the bride's flowers, for she had stripped the garden, he started out—a two-mile jog down the mountains under a moon which, newly-risen, was illuminating above her a beach of cloud brindled in streaks and crinkles, like ribbed sea-sand, where moon-babies bathed; and in Woodston churchyard he was placing his

pious garland when he heard a stump, stump, and there legging among the graves came Tom Price, searching for the grave of one Gertrude, digged during his journeyings at the front. "Come on, Tom, I'll shew you," said Shan, and led the way.

There Shan excused himself for not having looked up Tom before, and demanded of Tom why he had not been up to him, to which Tom answered: "You don't know how bad I be, for er bent only the leg wi' me, now, but worse still be the effects of that breath of lead I did get in the Megalienbergs in this left breast."

"This is the first I have heard of it," answered Shan.

"But you know, no doubt, that I was with those details with Little about Zeerust before I got my billet in the leg?"

"No, I didn't know."

"But you know that I was officially reported as missing in January—come."

"I didn't know. The fact is, I have not been following the war closely since December, or hearing any news up there."

"Well, that's so, Shan," said Tom Price, and he proceeded to give the story of a column three hundred strong, the guard of some empties

returning eastward toward Pretoria, which, after undergoing an ordeal of snipings for two days, was attacked in force from the ambush of a donga on the 19th of January, by a commando of Delarey's gang. After being shot in the shoulder Price had climbed up a kloof to escape capture by a Boer who chased him, and there in bush had fainted.

"Well, now!" went Shan, "and what next?"

"After coming to myself about ten hours later," answered Price, "I wandered about in a bit of a daze, till I fell in wi' a laager of waggons by a drift, where they dressed my wound, kept me for two days, and then, breaking camp, stripped me of my bandolier and rifle, and turned me adrift like a cur. Well, I was away on the trek to get back, and didn't do so dustily on the whole—richest bit of the whole karoo that bit up there, mostly orange-groves and brooks; the women-folk, too, were fairly good to me; and it was on the fourth afternoon, at a farm called De Geijerstam's that I come across Lieutenant Gordridge struggling on the stoep—"

"What, was there another Lieutenant Gordridge?" Shan wished to know.

"*Our* Lieutenant Gordridge, I do mean," said Price.

“He was killed on December the—”

“Him wasn’t that, now, if you’ll excuse me. . . . So you haven’t heard what’s been all the talk since I come back?”

The other returned no answer.

“Er wasn’t killed, look,” said Price, “for I saw’n a living man a month afterwards—not much of him left, that’s true, and that little as mad as half a bagful of march-hares with fever—it took two Boer women, big as London bobbies, to hold’n! I have been giving it all to Mrs. Gordridge to-day, for it didn’t come to her ears what I had to say till three days ago, and then er wouldn’t believe that there was any truth in it, forgetting that, if the lieutenant hasn’t written to her all this time, that may be because er’s too bad to write, for er got an explosive bullet in the groin, and that’s how it come about, no doubt, that, as er was known to be wounded, and was missing, er was first reported as missing, and then it was taken for certain er was dead. Anyway, this morning I was sent for to Glanncourt, and now Mrs. Gordridge is off to London—”

Now Shan, without speaking, went away, gazing on the ground, leaving Price in a state of surprise and gaping, till he disappeared in a timber-belt beyond the graves.

He did not go home, for he wished to hide his head, as the ostrich does, and the white wife and Jane, making a hundred guesses, sat in a state of terror, waiting to see him come till after one of the morning. When at last he entered the little fête of flowers and tapers that the house now was, it was with precipitate steps pressing through to the stair, and with no syllable but the three: "I am ill"; whereat the white wife, far too paralysed with affright to fly after him, to cry after him, stood rooted, heard him lock his room-door above, heard his tumble upon his bed set the room atremble, then heard that rumour of the universe and eternity that hums dumbly upon the ear-drum in the silence of every midnight.

XX

SHAN SULKS

ALL that night, all the next day, Shan, it must be admitted, played the poltroon within his locked room. It was his will not to marry, but he lacked the grit to go and say to Rosie "I can't marry," or "I won't marry on this our second wedding-day." He did not wish to see her, or to speak to her at all, or to anyone, and, finding solitude a roof to refuge in, and hunger good, he hid himself, lingering in the warmth and ease of the bed, getting brief sleeps sweet with forgetfulness, closing his eyes to Rosie's trouble, to to-morrow, to everything, except to the fact that he, for the moment, was cosy in bed: for it cannot be true that misery is valuable for character, but, if only miserable enough, will overthrow Cæsar himself into a ne'er-do-well; and when at nine of the wedding-day the white wife for the fourth time besieged the key-hole with beseechings, from Shan within came no reply.

"Shan, I have brought you a cup of tea."

No reply.

"Shan, won't you speak to me?"

No reply.

"This is our wedding-day, Shan!"

Then from quite near on the other side a voice said: "I have told you that I don't want any tea: can't you leave me in peace?"

"Aren't you any better, dear?"

"No."

"Aren't we going to be married?"

"Not to-day."

"Won't you let me go in to you?"

"I will later on."

"Won't you give me some notion what's the matter?"

"I will later, on condition that you go away now."

"Jane asks you what about the cow?"

"Good God! can't you let me be?"

She moved away pale, and, waiting chin on palm during most of the remainder of that day for something to happen, left him alone into the gloaming, when, on going again to him, she was again sent away. About midnight, however, when he believed her asleep, he sneaked out of the house, meaning to clear quite away and never more see her, but at nine the next morning while she was eating, he walked in, said "Hallo," and sat.

A smile curved his lips, a furnace of malice burned in his eyes.

“Don’t you come nigh me!” he cried with a laugh, when Rosie half-rose to approach him.

“Why, Shan?” she asked with reproach.

“Free country! I simply want to have nothing more to do with you, somehow. I seem to have turned right dead against you now.”

“What have I done?”

“Nothing! Couldn’t tell you! Only I don’t approve of you—that’s frank! I don’t believe you’re a good girl.”

“Dear,” said she, “those are words that could never be forgiven, if I did not know that you are not yourself.”

He smiled bitterly upon her, saying: “Faith, I believe you are tainted.”

“You won’t after you have had something to eat”—and she sprang up to get him something, but he, too, springing up, forced her by the wrist into her chair again; upon which she, covering her face, began to cry, while he, sitting over against her, begrimed her with irony, smiling, telling her that he could not think that she was much good, must be pretty light-minded, her love not having the value of thruppence, since she was as eager to marry him at present

as she had been eager to marry the lieutenant not yet two years gone, and it was "first come" with her, for she had soon forgotten the lieutenant, as she would soon forget him, Shan, if only the lieutenant could possibly come back from the grave arrayed in his grave-clothes, and she was one of those pheasant-hens which followed a fresh mate every May; and though the whole day long this brutality continued, for absolutely he could not move a moment from her, refused to see to his affairs, would not taste food, and though from time to time he handled her with no little roughness, the white wife after her first few tears endured it all with a perfect quietude, looking at him under her eyes, patiently waiting till his throat should be choked, and the kind of hydrophobia which drove him should wear out nature; and down at last at her feet near evening he dropped, his face buried in her lap, begging her with sobs to forgive him, seeing that he was not a happy man, and things were ill with him.

"Don't you think that I *do*?" she asked over him; "so will you have something to eat at last?"

"Ah, yes, do, for God's sake, give me a glass of water," he wailed.

After giving him food, during the taking of

which she refrained from asking any questions, she persuaded him to go to bed, and, having led him up like a child, sat by his side till he slept. The next day he came down mum but better, and without waiting to eat anything, went out to his fields, leaving the white wife still without any shadow of a notion why she was not even now a wedded woman. However, when during the afternoon a brougham drew up at the gate, and Dr. Blood and Mr. Orrock, going home together from a death-bed, came in to her, she was soon able to conjecture the truth. "You have heard the news, of course," said Dr. Blood the moment he entered.

"Yes," she answered, "by chance: for not much of earthly news is heard up here in heaven. You mean as to Mama Gordridge having gone to London?"

"Ah, she knows," sighed the doctor, with a glance at Mr. Orrock.

"No, she doesn't know," said Mr. Orrock: "I can see by her eyes that she doesn't."

"That she does, then," replied Dr. Blood: "you can tell by the look of her that she does." And Rosie stood glancing from one to the other.

"Very good," said Mr. Orrock, "I am open to bet—"

“I don’t bet: not used to betting,” replied Dr. Blood.

“He is too religious and good to bet, Rosie,” mourned the clergyman with a girding eye at the doctor.

“But why bet about it?” asked the white wife: “just ask me, can’t you?”

“Stay,” said Dr. Blood: “do you or do you not know that Arthur is alive and coming?”

Their eyes fixed upon her face, awaiting a word which did not come, saw her turn quite sheet-white, saw a light leap to her eyes, the meaning of which they could little divine. In two tickings of the clock she knew that she was being anew reserved for Arthur, and furiously her eyes burned, and her heart beat.

Going to the window, she forgot her visitors who forgot her in a new wrangle over drugs and God, and the moment they were gone wrangling, hatless she ran, blanched of face, with a blazing eye and lips as fixed as iron, down the road, till she reached a field where a labourer was grubbing up swedes out of the ground, and, “Rhodes,” she said to him, “I want you at once to take me and my things down to Glann-court—can you?”

He scratched his head, and "Not to-day, I don't think—" he began to say.

"Oh, don't say that, you have to, really," pleaded Rosie, and when he said at last that he would see, with this she had to be content, ran back up to the cottage, at once tumbled all her belongings into her trunks, and with Jane's aid attempted to bring them below, there to await the trap. But as the trunks mulishly refused to budge a foot below the stair-head for her, she had now to sit waiting for male aid, watching for hours those faded flowers with which four days before she had filled the house, nor for one moment did that fire in her eyes die down to the time when, at two o'clock, Shan walked in, looking wannish and worn out, asking: "Why have you told Rhodes to come—?"

"Because I chose to," was Rosie's answer—"because I desire to be at home."

"How is that, then?"

"Because I do."

He sat by the table, Rosie being bent over the grate, a blaze of anger in her gaze.

"Have you heard anything?" he suddenly asked.

"Yes!" she answered with spite, "I have: and I don't wish Arthur to come home and find me here with you: he mightn't like it."

“ He won’t mind, if it is I, you see.”

“ You know nothing about him! ”

“ Don’t I? ”

“ Not one little bit! Oh, I am sorry for you—how deluded you are! This fellow, whose friendship you prefer to my love, to amuse whom you have used me like a pawn or a draughtsman, he values you not one sou—”

“ Doesn’t he? ”

“ Not one little sou! All that balderdash about your youth, and about being born the same night, and the shootings, and the long days together, he has forgotten it all years and years ago, he has only used you as his tool—”

“ Has he? ” asked Shan smiling, though now his brow had collapsed upon the table.

“ It is only the truth that I am telling! ” cried Rosie. “ Your fatuity is surprising! Why, when he and I are married we shall both laugh at you as a poor quixote—often we shall! Don’t you understand, really, that anything like friendship is quite impossible between such as you and such as he? Look at how Mama Gordridge regarded the thought of his marrying me, who have been brought up with them—! and though he, under the influence of passion, is mad to marry me, *you* are far out of it: he looks

down upon you as something amiable made of mud. . . .”

Shan stood sharply up with a visage all wrenched, all blanched, but very calmly he said: “No, that can’t be true; but even so—give it as true—still there is God in Heaven, who sees.”

“At any rate, here’s off for little Rosie!” she cries.

“No, I’ll keep you till he comes,” said Shan.

“You wouldn’t dare!”—springing up.

“I am a daring one, you know.”

“So I’m a prisoner?”

“That’s it.”

Covering her face, she dropped back sobbing upon her chair.

XXI

SHAN HAS A VISITOR

Two weeks before this scene the watchmen at Table Mountain signal-station, Cape Town, gazing out in the direction of Rodden Island, saw there going down into the sunset a Castle liner homeward-bound, in whose smoke-room reclined Arthur Gordridge, talking to three eager listeners to the story of sorrows that he told, an Arthur in khaki, meagre more than half-way up the legs, then stout with sudden puff-out, and over the khaki a steamer coat in frieze, for it was cold, and a cap darkening his pallid dark nose—coming home quite alone, for months before this his company, its term of service expired, had returned to Britain.

Though the story that he told was told in phrases that ever fainted and sighed with weariness, fever seemed to glare out of those eyes of his which loomed even owlishly big, as it were two moons of bluebell blue; fever! for when in the middle of his story his servant bore him a glass of wine, he first, on sipping it, groaned, for it

was not the wine that he required, then with an eye alight with excitement, crying "this is the third time!" he hurled the wine at the man; and on the man turning in flight, Arthur was after him. But he had hardly run twelve steps when he faltered, turned white, and had to be supported by his friends, who with smooth words induced him to return to his sofa.

All the while the voyage lasted he was the tyrant and the spoiled child of the ship, the tyrant by his peevishness, the spoiled child by his feebleness. The farther North he came, the warmer it became, and then it was his habit, when the coolness of night, soothing his humours, induced a lassitude in him, to muse on the poop, eyeing the spuming pool of milk and moonlight commixed which was the ship's wake and he would then take out Rosie Jones' photograph to glance at, and would say to himself: "I deserve to be nursed now, and to have a decent time"; and he would say: "As to that O'Shannon, I mean to be rather decent to him."

He reached his Brook Street home during the evening of the fourth of June after an absence of almost two years.

His mother was descending a stairway in Buckingham Palace, where she had been

munching muffins with a friend, when a messenger handed her a card: Arthur come! She had had an African cable—not from himself, but from a friend—to say that he was “coming,” but had not understood from it that he was at sea. . . . Home in a flurry she hurried, and “Ah, Arthur, thank the good God!” she said, her two hands on his shoulders, though her heart smote her at that pallor under his tan, at that lamp alight in those eyes, and when among his first words she heard those dreaded ones: “Why have you not brought Rosie up with you?” instantly her heart boded within her that she had done wrong, and now she would have given everything that she owned to have Rosie now to give to her son.

“I am not in Town for the season,” she said: “in fact, this is a year without a season (the queen’s decease): but on hearing from a private named Price that he had seen you alive at some farm, I came up to hear what the Whitehall people could do as to seeking for you. . . . I had no need to bring anyone with me.”

“That’s all right. . . . She’s all right, I suppose?”

“Rosie? Oh, yes: quite all right.”

“I have just sent her a telegram. . . .”

“Have you? she will be glad. . . . Oh, Arthur, dear, sit down—come, sit with me, will you?” for Arthur, his two hands in the jacket-pockets of a dinner-suit, was restlessly throwing his legs from end to end of a narrow long drawing-room with that straddle of the gait which cavalrymen get; and he threw his face from side to side, whining: “Don’t worry, mother, I’m not very well. . . . How vilely hot it is in this place!”

“But if you would but sit down, if you could, I should feel easier, dear,” wooed his mother.

“Well, here I am: now tell me everything: what about the man—what’s his name?—O’Shannon.”

“O’Shannon is no more on the estate, dear.”

“Ah? For what reason?”

“Arthur, he stole some money from me.”

“Oh, I say! that’s bad.”

“And about Anne—you haven’t heard?”

“I haven’t heard any earthly thing.”

“Well, never mind now, you will know in time.”

“No, tell me.”

“Well, then, she is dead.”

“Little Anne? Oh, I say! What of?”

“Angina pectoris. . . .”

“Poor chit! She was a genius, that chit. . . . Oh,

mother, I can't stand this, really: don't you feel it insufferably hot?"—and up anew started Arthur to stalk from hearthplace to hearthplace through the room.

"It *is* rather hot—so unfortunate!" groaned Mrs. Gordridge with a face of distress: "what is one to do? Arthur, let me take you to a quiet dinner at Lady —"

"Dinner!" cried Arthur in the treble of querulousness: "do I look like dinner at Lady Anybody's?"

"Arthur, it would be new to you, it would rehumanize and distract you—"

"From what? I don't want to be distracted; I am already distracted. In fact, I don't see why I should stand London at all, I shall go straight down to Glanncourt, that's what I shall do."

At this Mrs. Gordridge, her eyes hanging abashed on the trouble of that brow, went pale, then, looking down at her hand, smiling, she asked: "When you say 'straight,' you don't mean —?"

"Yes, I do—to-night, I mean—by the something-or-other-train. I can't stand this."

"But, Arthur, you will at any rate wait to take me home, and as I have engagements for four days—"

“And why the smile that conceals some meaning, mother?” he asked, stopping with a sharp eye in his walking.

“I, Arthur! I am far enough from smiling!”

“Mother,” Arthur now said solemnly, “I only hope that everything is all right about Rosie, for you can see that I am hardly in a fit way to be badgered and balked—ah, I warn you, mother! I am capable of shooting myself or somebody dead. . . .”

Now Mrs. Gordridge’s eyelids closed pale, and out of her heart there rose the prayer: “God give me to be wise now!”—this being, indeed, one of the worst things about war, that, *after* the war, the sinews of the shooters, used to shooting, are apt to keep on shooting, and we remember how, when the Boers were finally brow-beaten, the sound of the rifle in homicide and suicide was rife in our land.

However, Mrs. Gordridge got Arthur to consent to wait in London for her till the next afternoon, soon whereupon, making an excuse to go from him, she flew to her room, and “Quick, Lucille,” she panted, “we have to go to Glanncourt at once, and forty minutes to get to Paddington in.” She then stole out of the

house, and before long was journeying westward, her purpose being, by humbling herself at last to Rosie, to get Rosie back, by prayers, by tears, to Glanncourt, and by elaborate precautions keeping Arthur in the dark as to Rosie's marriage, so put off the evil day of revelation until he should be better able to bear it. It was not very wise, not very proper: but the case was so desperate as to make her a coward, and, her cunning roused, but roused in a flurry, she flew womanlike, as to a refuge, to the first ruse that was offered to her mind. She did not reach home till after two in the morning, for, on getting to Ebbstow, five miles from Glanncourt, she had to telephone home for a brougham, and then to wait for it, so she then abandoned her thought of calling Rosie to her before daybreak, and, whispering to herself that she had anyway a clear day, fell weary to sleep.

She little thought that Arthur might find out her flight that very night!

Anyhow, in the first hours of the morning a note was sent off up the mountain to Rosie. Rosie was not at home. The horseman brought back the account that Rosie had started out upon the walk to Ebbstow to watch the yeomanry march, and though he rode some con-

siderable distance round the Chase upon the Ebbstow road, he had failed to overtake Rosie. Now, it was already after ten when this messenger returned, and as Rosie's journey to Ebbstow meant a delay of hours more, a brougham was urgently turned out toward the town, in the hope that it would be hitting upon and bringing her. It did not, however: and when two hours, fevered with a thousand fears, doubts, hopes had gone by, and noon was sounding from the stable-clock, and no sign yet of the brougham's coming, Mrs. Gordridge, in order now to send another messenger up the mountain, turned inward from the drawing-room window whence she had been watching over The Meadows for the brougham. Now, a moment before she turned about, she had heard a step behind her, and had supposed it to be a servant's; but, as she turned about, her heart bounded into her mouth at the sight of Arthur standing there, staring with a bright eye at her. She dropped upon a chair, panting something at him, her palm on her heart.

“Where is she?” he sharply asked.

“Rosie is out. . . .”

“How long has she been out?”

“How long? Not long.”

“Why, then, hasn’t she received the wire which I sent her last night?—here it is.”

He spoke with some show of calm, though the wrath with which he flogged his leg was ominous of eruption, while Mrs. Gordridge, for her part, her fingers folded before her, sat quiet with a rocking of the body backward and forward, a motion of one mourning over a burn. She had forgotten that the telegram would still, probably, be lying there in the hall; nor was there any reply to his query: the game was played.

“I will let you know,” she said on broken breaths, “on condition—”

“No conditions!”

“Yes, you are hardly quite well: on condition—that you sit down—and let me lock—”

“Well, here I am sitting down—waiting patiently—sitting down. Now tell me.”

“Arthur, dear—”

“No, tell me. Here I am—sitting down—waiting patiently.”

“Arthur, listen—”

“By Heaven! the very thing I feared that’s the very thing I find. She isn’t here: for some reason or other she isn’t here. . . . God! the very thing I feared.”

“ Dear, you will soon see her ”—seated on a stool at his feet, soothing his hands, wetting them.

“ Where is she? ”

“ Not far—Arthur, you have my assurance—believe your mother—”

“ But she isn't *here*, that's the misery; she may be in Russia for what I care, if she isn't here. . . . *Where* is she? ”

“ Arthur, dear—”

“ No, tell me: here I am—sitting down.”

“ Arthur, dear, have I not said that Rosie isn't far? really, that should be enough for you: I have sent for her, she is on the road now—coming—near—”

“ Where was she? ”

“ Dear, in Somersetshire.”

“ What doing in Somersetshire?”

“ Arthur, she was spending a few days with the Marstons.”

“ The Marstons? Did she ever before—? I hope it's true, mother! ”

This he said with a threatening nod, and up now he sprang and ran, she with a pang of panic calling “ *Arthur!* ” after him, for not having expected him down for hours yet, she had not as yet admonished the servants to be mute, and,

in fact, out of the mouth of the first footman whom he encountered in a vestibule, in a few seconds Arthur knew all.

And there during what was to her an age sat Mrs. Gordridge, all paralysed, waiting upon the silence to utter a sound, gaping at the door-way through which he had gone out; till on a sudden he was once more with her, no longer red, but now most grimly exsanguined, dead but for the life that rioted in his eye, in his right hand a gun, in his left his stick; and "Heartless!" he hissed: a word that withered the heart that heard it.

Ghostly as he, mute, her gaze gloated upon his face, her soul musing upon the fact of the gun. . . .

But not for long: for, as if he had come back only in order to hiss at her that one word "*heartless*," almost at once he turned again to go, and she heard him say: "I'll have her from him. . . ."

Now she found a mouth to shout to him: "Arthur! take care! that man will kill you. . . .!"

"No, *I'll* do the killing," he cried out: "the hound vowed to me. . . ."

"But, Arthur—here! listen! one word!"

"*Heartless!* A burglar, too! He shan't have

her!" and he was gone, she struggling to her feet to rush after, bawling "Arthur!" but, her feet getting entangled in her gown, down, staggering, she dropped, and now shipwrecked lay on the ground, calling still "Arthur!" and again "Arthur!" after him, though by that time Arthur, bolted out of the house, was on the way to speed down the steep that leads to the Morplepiece.

Thence it was a two-mile climb to the heights, and twice he enquired his way of girls who wondered what he was going to kill, and once, feeling faint, he had to lean against a kiln a little.

It was one of those June noon-days that are like the face of Jove, fatherly, blue-eyed, and broad-boned—more jovial than beautiful, since no breath blew its foliage to make it "strange," and its cloud-masses, reflected in Fowle's Lake, floated without motion in an arch of so large an architecture, that Shan, surveying them over his hoe, marvelled in his heart how without pillars it was all upheld. He had been "hacking" (i.e. hoeing) an acre of potatoes in his field, but, feeling the heat fierce, was now taking it easier, his eye domiciled in cloud-town, and in his mind that hymn—

These are Thy glorious works, Parent of good,
Almighty, Thine this universal frame. . .

when he heard the gate-catch jerk, and now down dropped his hoe, and a "Ho!" of happiness hopped out of his heart, spying Arthur: of happiness and surprise! for though it had been everywhere said of Arthur that he "was coming," Shan had no knowledge that Arthur had left South Africa: but there now was Arthur, flushed and fresh: and "it is finished" was the thought in Shan's heart, as he ran. . . .

Till suddenly, midway, his eagerness reeled dying, like the eagle pierced in mid-career: there was that severe air, the rifle, that unfriendly eye; and, as he paused, Arthur pelted ten paces to him, and they stood face to face.

Shan's eyes light-blue, narrow, long, quickly twinkling with kindness and humour, though now with doubt, too, and apprehension, under a broad low brow; Arthur's darker, large, and now ardent with wrath under an arch of brow: eye to eye they looked.

"You cur!"

"Who? I? *Wait—!*"

There was no waiting: Arthur raised the rifle, whether to kill, or only to fell, he himself most likely could not have told, and though in two

ticks the rifle was lying on the ground, wrung out of his grasp, there remained the stick, a stoutish stick of ebony, which Arthur brought down with so barbarous a brand across Shan's brows, that at once Shan stumbled backward, and on one bended knee half-lay, half-knelt, upheld by his left arm; the second stroke, delivered with lips venomously fixed and with all the virtue of a man's arm, felled the poor victim flat; the third stroke splintered the stick into two; and with the stump the others were administered. Arthur seemed never to have enough of it, feebly beating and still beating the bloody head, himself all bloodless. From Shan's mouth broke and grew a sound, a most lugubrious groaning, and from Arthur, repeatedly, as he feebly beat, a gasp of "shan't have her"; till now Shan won his weight to one knee, then raised it to the other knee, as laboriously slow as though ground down under a burden, and, still hammered, having manoeuvred himself to his legs, ran staggering, Arthur hatless after. Near the high side of the field, the side remote from the road, stood a shed toward which Shan turned his flight for refuge, and even as they reached this, the beating ceased, Shan pitching sheer beneath a steer's belly in the shed, while

Arthur, reeling in a sort of blindness just before he reached it, leaned his shoulder on the door-frame, and there with shut lids remained.

Minute after minute now passed, and never a sound was there, save those of sparrows twittering round, and now and again a groan from the frame on the ground.

Then with the same slowness as before Shan got himself up, took his jacket from a peg, contrived to draw it blindly on. He patted the steer's head, smearing it with red, leaving a tooth on it; and drooping upon it, he smiled foolishly with it, and shook his head at it, and slapped its face with a dead hand, while it mildly eyed him. Arthur, meantime, was leaning on the door-post, silent, till, hearing Shan pass out, he opened his eyes to say: "You shan't have her," upon which Shan stopped with his back to Arthur, a bowed back, a bowed head, and after a minute, without looking round, through blood and rheum he bubbled: "You can have her. She is in that cottage up yonder in the grove under the road. But me you don't see again. I see that you have hardly loved me, nor your heart ever guessed. . . . But be bringing me to her remembrance a bit, and you, too, may be. . . ."

Now he moved away down, stanching his wounds with his handkerchief, and the other saw him stoop amidfield to pick up his hat, and thereupon saw him go through the gate, and down the mountain to the right, and out of sight.

After which Arthur sat for fully half-an-hour at the shed-door, and then, all at once in a heat, was hurrying down the steep to the road, and up the road, and down three board-steps into the bower which surrounded Shan's house.

The door lay open: and there at a table sat Rosie, who, having only a few moments before come back from Ebbstow, hat and gloves still on, had in her hand the mandate from Mrs. Gordridge, which she had found awaiting her, and now was considering it, when, lifting up her eyes, she saw Arthur regarding her; and up she sprang to him, crying: "Oh, I am glad! I was told in Ebbstow that you had come, and you have come *au galop* to see Shan, that's quite grand of you. . . . When did you arrive in England?"

"Only yesterday. . . . I say, Rosie, you are looking awfully well. . . ."

"Married life and balmy airs! You, I see, are looking a bit pale and Boered—not a pun!

though I would undertake soon to make you well, if you would deign to come and spend just two weeks up here with Shan. . . . Think you could manage to squeeze your immensity into a cottage? It is better than tents and battle-fields, anyway! and this girl, personally, would not give it in exchange for a score of Glann-courts—the air's so fresh and rich. Sit on this chair before the door, and let me offer you a hospitable tumbler of—shall we say milk? Milk is a beverage in these heavens, nor be they wholly bereaved of honey. No milk? Well, I've *got* some wine, a kind of wine, half wine, half vinegar, call it garwine or winegar. . . . None of that even? Glorious idea—a cigarette! No? So what shall I do to please you? Only mention it. . . .”

“You are awfully bright and well, really,” said Arthur. “I expected to find you—”

“Peaking and lean? Dreary and drooping? I fain would be! but between this brisk air, the native bacon, married life—”

“But, dear”—he seized one of her hands—“we have to be quick, if we mean to escape beastly scenes: I have been brutally robbed of you, and I mean now to break through everything—”

"Oh, that's naughty," she murmured, her eyes cast down, smiling to herself.

"It isn't even naughty! it's a case in which it is even perfectly right! . . . he shan't have you."

"I fear, though, that you will hardly find it easy to take things away from him," remarked Rosie: "he has rather a grim sort of grip. But it is queer that you didn't see him in coming up the road! then he would have told you . . . he ought to be in his field. . . ."

"I did see him," Arthur said, "and this, as you see, is all that is left of my stick. . . ."

At this she, snatching her hand free, started from him.

"Oh, you struck him?" she asked, and Arthur was far too amazed at the sudden redness of fury that inflamed her, to her very eye-whites, to reply.

"Oh, you dared? You struck him, Arthur?" Rosie asked: "and he, what did *he* do? Did he fell you to the earth, as he did once before? Oh, *don't* tell me that he took it quietly, I shall be so ashamed of him!"

Nearly crying with rage, she trembled throughout, from crown to feet, like the little tongue of a morrisco-bell which is shaken. From the very first, indeed, even when she offered the milk,

etc., some nerve of Arthur's had been aware of a hardness, a sarcasm in her towards him, due to her will of self-retention, and to her jealousy, angry as the malignancy of a gangrene, lest Arthur should come to lord it, or should continue to regard himself as the superior, or the equal, of the man whose flag she flew; and her keenness to make him feel his inferiority, and her despair of wholly destroying, all in a hurry, a point-of-view centuries old in him, added fuel to his fire and fury to her ire. Arthur half stood up, upholding himself with one arm on the arm of his chair, staring, stammering: "I am sorry. . . . The fact is I am hardly very well. . . ."

"Oh, I am sorry if you are unwell," retorted Rosie without one sprig of pity, "though that seems to be no reason why you should go about rendering other people unwell. But didn't he mention anything at all to you before you hit him?"

"No, your husband——"

"He isn't my husband! Listen to it! You two fellows—most insolently, I must say—after making a bargain as to which of you I was to belong to, as though I was a brandgoose or a brach, have led me a nice dance for nearly two years, and are still at it, it seems; but he, though he has slighted me whom he loves more than his

own life, has been true to *you*, and you have broken your stick on his head. It was your purse-proud mother's intention to ship me out to the wilds of China out of your way, and I was going, when he, in order to keep me for you, went through a form of marriage with me, after marrying someone else—a grey-head, a greedy, drunken hag, who has sucked the very blood from his being, and you have beaten him with your stick for it. Since then, for nearly two years, I have lived with him, under the same roof, his room and mine on different sides of the same corridor, and all the time he loved me, and more than half of the time I have adored him like the lord of all the Heavens, but I still remain to-day as I was born, and you have drawn his blood, Arthur. Do you imagine that your mother loves you so much as this, or could? Would any father do one half of all this for you? Then when we understood that you were dead, we waited for his wife, the old woman, to die, and she did, and we were just going to be married, when he got to know that you were still alive, and he wouldn't have me, no, not though it almost made him crazy, and you have cracked his skull with that thick stick. . . . Oh, this would be a bit funny, if it were not

so bitter! Just because you possess a few thousand roods of land which people are saying now that you have no real right to. . . . But why doesn't he come? Where is he, please?"

Tears of passion and pity shone in her eyes, unseen by Arthur, who, leaning now against the door-post, looking outward, answered: "I heard him say that he was going away permanently: I hope that he did not mean it. . . ."

"Permanently?" she muttered; then with a shriek of passion: "But men do mean it when they say things! You have no idea what a man is like! He is gone for good!"

One moment afterwards she was torturing her shape on her knees before him, wringing her palms together, beseeching him with a face pierced with an anguish like neuralgia, "Tell me how to find him . . . life's no good to me without. . . . I shall just go and throw myself—" and suddenly, before he could reply, was up and gone flying toward the gate, but half-way toward it doubled back to supplicate him with a crying face: "For God's sake, lend me some money, I have got none. . . ."

Arthur's eyes slowly opened; and slowly turning them upon her, he said: "Stay, I'll come. . . ."

And together out to the gate they hastened,

down the mountain road, Rosie, however stoutly he strode, still to be found a foot before him. . . . Some way down some labourers answered to them that Shan had taken the way to the station, and to the station they two hastened—a great way, there to gather that he had taken the 1.8 train to Ebbstow; so, hiring a fly from a farmer, to Ebbstow Arthur drove, five miles, arriving before two; but only to find that Shan had left by the 1.25 for London.

“Just as I thought,” Rosie wailed: “he is gone for good!”

“Wait,” said Arthur, “we shall find him.”

“He is gone to Africa or Australia!” cried Rosie: “I have heard him say that he would.”

“Then, I will find him in Africa or Australia,” declared Arthur.

There was no difficulty as to tracing in Ebbstow the movements of the fugitive Shan: he had first entered Burke’s the chemist to have his wounds dressed, had then drawn to the amount of forty pounds out of the bank, and then had taken the train; after tracing which, there was naught for the two investigators to do, save to luncheon, to send a telegram to Glanncourt, and to wait for the six o’clock train; and gazing down together over the bridge into those brownish

Wye-waves, where the white wife beheld only Styx mixed with staring vacancies and abysms of widowhood, he proposed to her to go home, undertaking to find Shan alone, if she would confide in him; but she made answer: "Even if you found him, I doubt if he would come back, unless I was by to beseech him to"; so at six she and he set off for London.

After breakfast the next morning in Brook Street, as he was speaking to her of his plan of action for the day, she suddenly kissed his hands, saying: "You are good; forgive all that I said to you yesterday in the heat of passion, will you? He and I are two poor people of the working-class, who have nothing in the world except each other."

"You are not poor," he said: "half of all that I have is this man's, and the other half, if you will say so, is yours."

"Well, he knew you more accurately than I," replied Rosie, "and it was not without grounds that he regarded the Gordridges as grander than kings."

Arthur now started out for the City, and early in the afternoon returned to her out of the whirlpool's noise and turmoil with the heartiest presage, like the bird with a branch to the Ark:

Shan had taken a second-saloon berth on the *China*, to sail at noon on the Thursday! whereon there was nothing to do but to wait two days, during which Arthur went to his bed with an ague, and Mrs. Gordridge, hastening to London to nurse him, heard the whole story of Rosie. "Well, you are an unmarried girl, as it turns out," the old lady observed to Rosie after dinner on the Wednesday night, "and I personally should be glad now, Arthur being in the way he is, if you would be good to him."

"There are no less than two impossibilities against it, Mama Gordridge," replied Rosie: "Arthur undoubtedly possesses too noble a mind to have me now that he knows all; and, secondly, I'd defy any female creature to cohabit two years with Shan O'Shannon as I have, and not find him irresistible. He's as imperious as a rope. One can't swim up Severn, after all, when the river is falling."

"Well, I think that you choose wisely," said Mrs. Gordridge; "I told you before the marriage, that you would be growing fond of O'Shannon, and, you see, I was right: for I always foresee everything."

The next forenoon, though his skin burned with fever, his teeth stuttered with cold, and it

was very rough weather, Arthur would take the white wife to the Albert Dock: and after they had waited about half-an-hour on the quay, pigmies pacing beneath that busy burgh which the ship made, there, burdened askew on the queerish side by a bag of brand-new leather, with petty steps came Shan in haste, patches of sticking-plaster fixed on his face, until on a sudden he saw, and started, and stood stock still, and with an underlook contemplated them two: upon which, she, for her part, darted at him, and laughed, and pinched his arm; and as he looked at her, full of her, all his manhood thrilled, hearing near his ear from a full heart breathed, "Bucephalus"; and Arthur added, "Cœur de Lion."

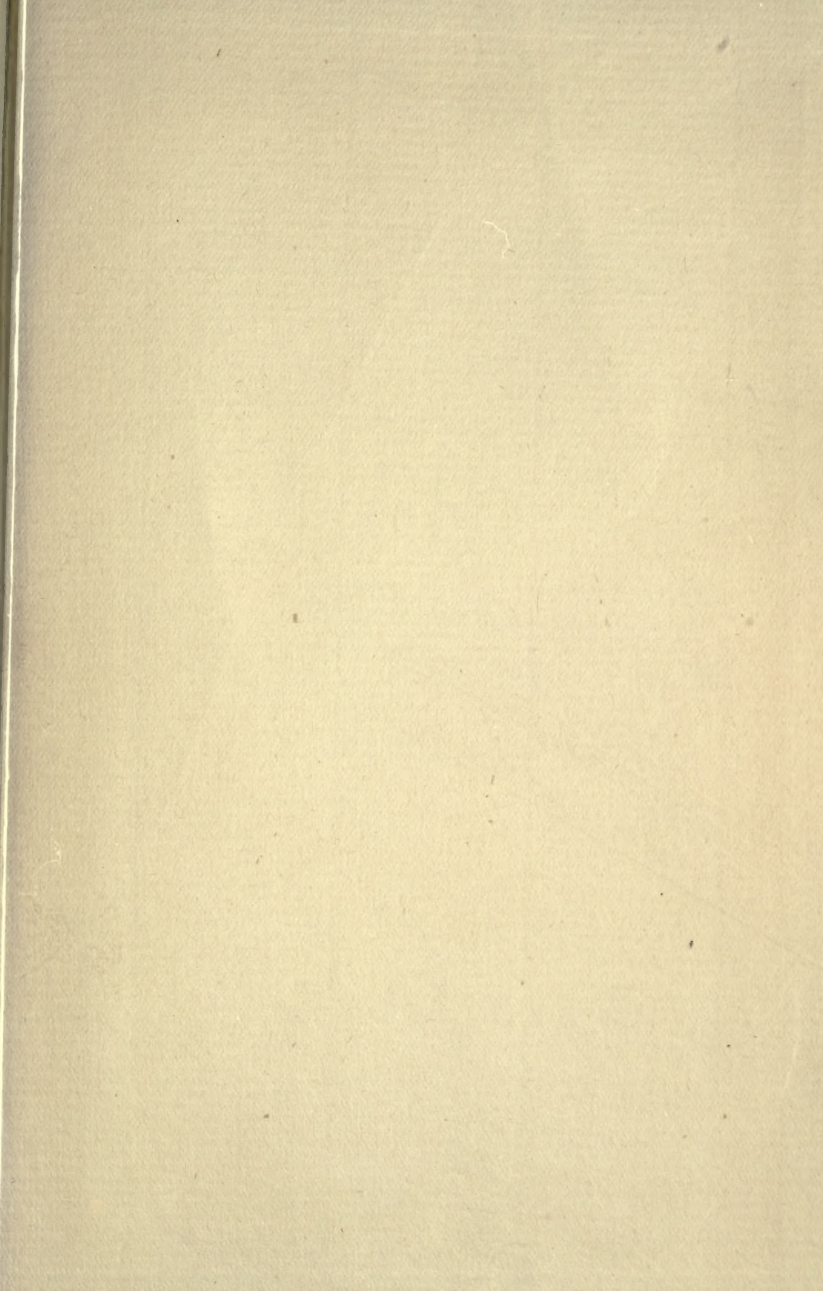
One at one arm of Shan, one at the other, the white wife and Arthur then pulled—away from the ship, and had him in the brougham moving West through Holborn, when on the top of an omnibus the white wife's eye remarked two men talking in a sort of fury: excited, glad, she waved, she hailed at them: it was no good; Shan tried to attract their eyes, Arthur tried: all in vain; Dr. Blood and Mr. Orrock, preoccupied with their quarrel like two wights blind to the precipice's brink, dead to thunder and light-

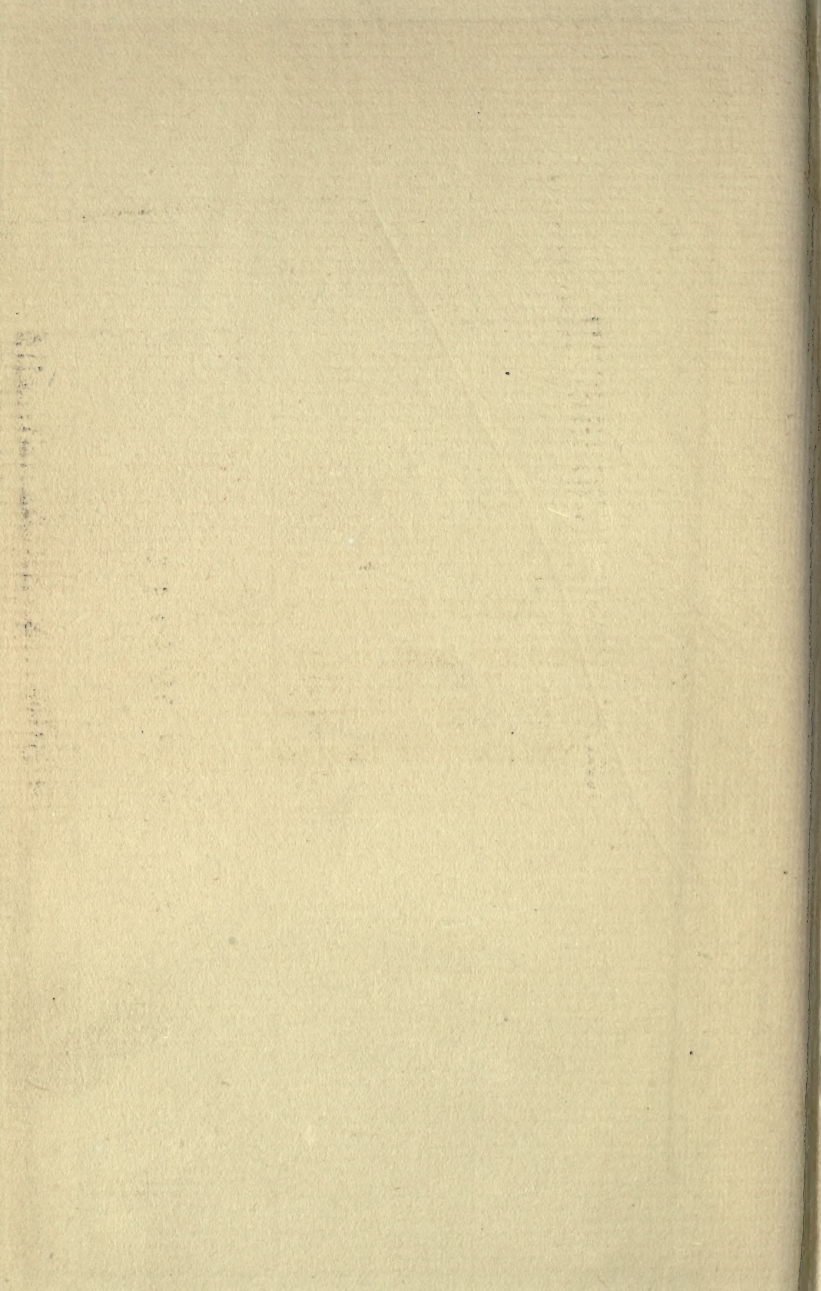
ning, took no notice; but just then a rougher rush of wind, snatching off the clergyman's shovel-hat, whirled it quite away upward, turned it to scoff, made light of it, worried it, dropped it; and Dr. Blood, seeing in this the finger of God, following its flight with his eye, while with a bowed back Mr. Orrock in rickety career was critically creeping down to the street to recapture it, saw, as the shovel-hat reached the street, the three in the brougham: so the doctor and the parson, squeezing themselves in, went with them to Brook Street, to take part in all that passed during the ensuing days. They were the days of that gale which raged from the eighth into the twelfth of June, on whose third midnight Shan and Rosie heard it from an old tavern-room, like a garret, close to Grange Court, heard its surgings grow to augustness and roar with a great prolongation of argument, intriguing as though struggling through impeding gross media, like a period of Cicero and the career of Cæsar, then, those struggles lulled, lagrimoso roll low its roar, and go, solving and dissolving itself into mere pleadings, appealingings, weariness of bereavement, streams of grieving too drear to dream, and brief last brigues, fatigued intrigues, and musings, last broodings, and musics too

weary-sweet to breathe; then again heard it surge and grow to grandeur, and roar through a long contention, like a sentence of Cicero, and roll its roar low, and go, oratory of God. Such was Shan's *íw, íw*, go it, go it, high Hymen-hymn, and marriage-oration. But when on the fourth midnight they were walking in sight of home, the storm on a sudden was wholly over, all was quite calm, and, casting up their eyes to the sky, they beheld it like some begum-bride brightly arrayed for her bridegroom, all gaudy in veils of gauze with brilliants glistening through from beneath, without any moon or a single cloud around God's throne, only clouds of glory; and pacing up their mountain-side, it was so still, they beheld the poplar and pine-tops about their house standing outlined without a motion against the darkness of the sky, like towering ships that after great groanings far out in the ocean's roarings find their griefs riding finally at surcease, asleep in the port and peace of God; nor in all that calm and darkness was any ray anywhere to be marked, save the star-rays and that ray which rayed out of Shan's house, where Jane, and Pruie, too, who had been warned by a wire to be there, kept wake, awaiting the wedded pair.

THE END

Letchworth: At the Arden Press.





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Shiel, Matthew Phipps
The white wedding

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